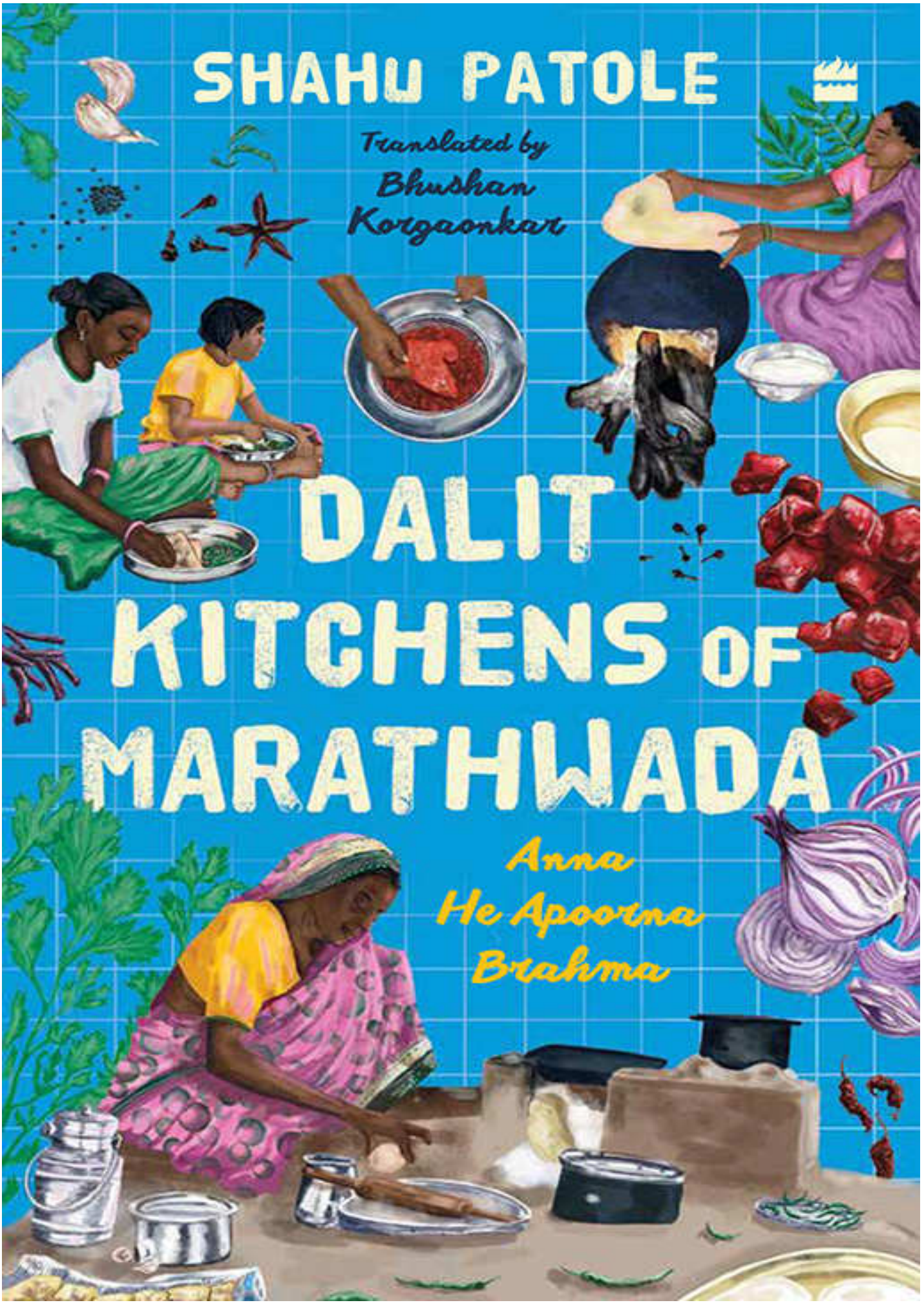
SHAHU PATOLE
Translated by
Bhushan
Korgaonkar
DALIT
KITCHENS OF
MARATHWADA
Anna
He Apoorna
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SHOUT
SHARE
IT

DALIT KITCHENS OF MARATHWADA

Anna He Apoorna Brahma

SHAHU PATOLE

Translated by Bhushan Korgaonkar

HarperCollins *Publishers* India

To my beloved mother, Gunabai Manik,
who says, 'Cooking is a game of estimates,
jugglery and hypnotism.'

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Reach shall be universal and misconceptions shall cease!

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Preface

Vegetarianism or non-vegetarianism—which one is superior? This has been a hot topic of discussion for years. It is usually only the vegetarians who facilitate and indulge in such discussions. Also, those who claim that 'vegetarian is the supposed way of the human diet' win the debate without any opposition. Because there are no proponents or staunch supporters of non-vegetarianism. Yet the number of non-vegetarians seems to be on the rise. Loyalists of vegetarianism constantly write about it. There are numerous exclusive television channels, newspapers, books, discourses, online channels, etc., which broadcast programmes on religion and spirituality. Such channels applaud vegetarianism.

If vegetarianism is so great, then why is it that the population of non-vegetarians has always outnumbered that of vegetarians without any publicity, promotion, discussion and debate? Why are so many people of different castes and ethnic groups that traditionally support vegetarianism turning to a non-vegetarian diet? Why do vegetarians care so much about the health of non-vegetarians? Who has the right to decide on the cooking and eating choices, and the food culture of one's kitchen, other than the concerned individuals or families themselves? Why wouldn't one, then, feel that it is an attack on their fundamental right to choose? Non-vegetarians do not force vegetarians to eat meat or judge them for their choice.

When faced with the vegetarian propagandists, non-vegetarians are made to feel immoral and guilty. The reasons for this are firmly embedded in the local religious and sectarian systems. Socially, vegetarian groups consider themselves superior even today. The pride and the arrogance of their caste supremacy is consistently seen through their social behaviour and propaganda. If vegetarianism is of such a high standard, then why are pure vegetarians affected by heart disease? If vegetarianism is so superlative, then how did non-vegetarians make such great progress in science and space engineering? Why should we use cars, mobile phones and computers based on technology developed by non-vegetarians? Were tablets created by people from the vegetarian sects? At a time when ardent rituals and the sattvic diet (vegetarian and balanced diet according to Ayurveda) were at their peak in this country, cultures with a predominantly non-vegetarian diet in the West saw the formation of universities like Oxford. At the same time, another kind of orthodoxy was also witnessed in the West, for example, Galileo's persecution. However, there was an eventual realization of these mistakes, which led to acknowledgement and following of a scientific approach. It is this realization and acceptance of error that is missing from the sectarian exponents of vegetarianism.

If today's modern technology is created by foreign countries where a majority practise non-vegetarianism, then do vegetarians decline to contribute to the socio-economic development of those countries? Which is the community in this country that makes its livelihood by trading in foreign goods (made by mostly non-vegetarian countries) such as cars, computers, tablets, etc.? Are they all non-vegetarian as well? With whose support did the non-vegetarian people rule this country for 800 to 900 years? What is the class and caste of people who make a huge fuss about vegetarian puritanism and set up their own exclusive vegetarian enclaves prohibiting entry to non-vegetarians?

Proponents of vegetarianism often cite the example that in the case of herbivorous animals, as soon as their babies are born, they begin to stand up and walk, for example, deer, cows and other similar animals. On the other hand, carnivorous babies depend on their parents for a long time, for example cats, leopards and so on. Even their eyes do not open immediately. This is a point they use to justify supremacy of vegetarianism. But is it a valid argument? It conveniently disregards that humans are also animals. Humans, whether vegetarian or non-vegetarian, take care of their children for years together. Humans don't even stop at their children. They spend years building fortunes for their grandchildren and several future generations. Why do human babies depend on their parents for more than half their lifetime? Humans feel that their children should be in their control and follow their advice, gain fame and achieve unparalleled success, marry a suitable match of

their choice and advance the family name. Animals, whether vegetarian or non-vegetarian, never have such aspirations. Why?

Another point is vegetarian animals don't have canine teeth. Then what is the use of human canines?

How many people who promote a sattvic and vegetarian diet carry out extensive manual work? How many of them sweat in the fields? How many people depend on agriculture for their livelihood? Or are they simply middlemen and agents only?

It is said that the emotions of the cook percolate into the food that he or she cooks and eventually to the person who eats that food. Thus, the feelings and mental state of the eater are influenced by the cook's feelings. Then wouldn't the emotions of those who grow food in the fields percolate down into the grain? Do the eaters bother to find out whether the person growing the crops was vegetarian or non-vegetarian? It is unheard of for a food grain to be grown by a staunch practitioner of vegetarianism. If the attitude of people is shaped by the food they eat, then wouldn't the attitude of the person who grows the grain percolate into that crop? In which laboratory shall this be proven?

Basically, what one eats is a personal matter. If people would really have become 'satshil' (good-natured) by eating sattvic food, then the caste and class system wouldn't have survived in this culture. Exploitation and parasitism in the name of religion would not have become so rampant. We need to look at how a person treats others in society, rather than what he eats. Rather than being proud about one's food culture, one should be vigilant that their behaviour, even inadvertently, does not harm others or compromise their personal freedom. This is the true culture and quality of a true sattvic.

The purpose behind writing this book is not to demote or oppose vegetarianism. Nor is it to promote or create propaganda to eat meat. The progression of culture is synonymous with the development of diet, recreation and social conduct, thus impacting food culture in an open and progressive way. However, it was found to be rigidly stuck with the caste and class system. Sattvic, rajasic (royal) and tamasic (overprocessed, over-spicy or stale) were the three food categories strictly fixed according to caste and class. Religious texts and their followers had declared that the food one ate determined one's behaviour, attitude and mentality. There was no one to challenge this idea. Where even gods were bound in ritualistic diets, how could one question or contest anything about mere mortals? It was and is a vicious circle of diet, character, class, beliefs and caste. Diet determines the class and caste which determine the gods people worship and that in turn determines the diet and the attitude.

Those who depended on others' physical labour and themselves did not indulge in laborious work, would eat sattvic food and observe days of fasting on many religious occasions. Other classes were allowed to consume food as per their own choice but were always judged and looked down upon.

Food habits and caste cannot be separated in Indian culture. Just as caste is cemented at birth, so is diet. The erstwhile Mahar and Mang are the two main Dalit castes in Maharashtra who suffered under untouchability. These castes and their food habits have both been neglected. This book attempts to pen down and document their primary diet and a few recipes of these two communities and trace the social and religious hierarchy of their culture. The scope of this book will be limited to the dietary habits and cultural practices of the Mang and Mahar communities of the Marathwada region, as I have been born and brought up there and am well-versed with its culture.

People born in these communities may not find anything new in these pages. It may possibly be new to the urbanites from these communities, especially those born after the drought of 1972. There have been many instances of Dalits feeling embarrassed when the topic in social conversations revolves around food habits. Even my own siblings didn't like my writing this book in such great detail. But this is the story of the food my parents ate and their parents ate—an acquired taste, especially one acquired through centuries of discrimination.

I understand that there are a lot of flaws in this book. I am not a thinker, a social researcher, a veteran scholar of old saint literature or an expert orator on religion and culture. Readers of other castes or of the same castes in other regions may feel that this book has said nothing about their food culture. It would be a pleasure if they were inspired to write a book recounting the food culture of their castes and regions. Some

people may get angry because I am writing all this so openly. But why should we hide and deny reality? And for how long?

Technology doesn't arrive by itself. Not only does it bring along its own culture but it also creates a new culture. Hopefully, new technology along with social media will gradually bring the food culture of the lower castes and classes to the forefront and make it popular and appreciated amidst all these local poli-bhaji kendras (Maharashtrian mini-meal centres) and ready-to-eat food stalls found in every nook and corner and even malls today. It would have been all right if any culture, including a food culture, had died a natural death. But suppressing the same and inculcating shame and guilt amongst its practitioners cannot be justified. And there are no signs that this will stop happening. Therefore, it is our responsibility to at least document our own food habits and culture.

Twenty years ago, a food column was quite popular in the then leading and famous Marathi daily. I enthusiastically sent an article chronicling the food I knew, but it didn't get published. I sent it to a few more newspapers and magazines, but no one published it. My friends knew my extreme point of view about food habits and culture. I had written an article on it couple of years ago. A professor of journalism at Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University and a socialist friend Jaydev Dole said, 'You must write this in detail.' I was not sure about the strength and potential of my writing. However, it is likely that writer–publisher Shrikant Umrikar was.

I started working on it. I made a list of reference books and texts popularly known to the Marathi masses. After consulting with my friends, it was decided to focus only on the oldest and most highly acclaimed books in Marathi, namely *Leelacharitra*, *Dnyaneshwari*, *Dnyaneshwaranche Abhanga* and *Tukaram Gatha*. But in the process of writing, I got hooked on to the journey of exploring 'self' and 'my food culture' and I ended up reading many more books, such as *Namdev Gatha*, two volumes of *Eknathi Bhagavat* (an explanation of *Ekadash Skandha*, *Gaathasaptshati*, etc.) Supplies to satisfy this addiction were sponsored by Shrikant.

For the last one-and-a-half years, I had immersed myself in the world of old books. I would bore my close friends Dhananjay Chincholikar and others with all the new knowledge that I was acquiring. It was like an instant satsang (rendezvous with a spiritual guru) with all my 'cut-copy-paste' of spiritual gyan. I read these religious texts with the greatest respect, but I remained detached from the philosophy in them, because I realized that they had no space or respect for me, my caste and my culture. I was not angry with this. But I was hurt and disappointed. And this feeling will stay forever. Because I know that everything and everyone becomes a puppet in the hands of a larger system. This book has many repetitions. But if these were avoided, the repetitions in the system and the plethora of opinions will not be registered properly.

Lastly, I came across a verse by Sant Eknath, which summarizes an important point mentioned in Indian spiritual literature that I identify with:

Vivad vade he to adham lakshan
Bhaktiche karan na sadhe yene.

Meaning:

To challenge something (in this spiritual discourse) or get into a debate is a sin and a sign of stupidity. If you indulge in such behaviour, then all your devotion and spiritual progress is futile.

I am glad that I am stupid and my devotion and spiritual progress is wasted.

Shahu Patole

Reach shall be universal and misconceptions shall cease!

The Indian social system in rural areas had two villages within the same village: the main one and the one on its outskirts. This book talks about the food practices of the latter.

I had made friends with a few journalists from Africa when I was in Delhi. I had once taken them to an eatery serving beef and I relished it along with them. They were surprised and asked, 'How do you eat beef like a pro despite being Hindu?' I explained that many Indian castes practising Hinduism eat beef, buffalo meat, pork, etc., traditionally and that I belong to one such caste. I also enlightened them about the categories of those practising Vedic rituals, Jainism, Buddhism, Shaivism, Vaishnavism and so on, and about the varnas and caste system. Everything was narrated in my broken English. They would discuss these matters every now and then. I don't know how much they understood but I know for sure that they took home a clear knowledge that in India, not only Muslims but Hindus also eat beef. Indians settled in Africa and other continents for jobs or trade have always spread false information about how 'Hindus regard a particular animal holy and how Hindus are pure vegetarian'.

I experienced the same reaction in Nagaland, which is an integral part of India, when I was working there for three years. The Naga people were equally astonished to know that we eat everything despite being Hindu. I was instrumental in eradicating these false beliefs about Hindu food practices. I made them aware that in the rest of India too there are people who follow food habits similar to theirs. I, in fact, teased them for not having eaten camel meat. I have learnt through experience, that in a foreign land, common food habits bring people closer just like common language does. I am happy that all these people, in addition to many new readers, will now be able to access this information, anecdotes and recipes in English.

'Hindus eat only greens', 'they follow "Chaturmas" [abstinence for four months]', 'they don't eat onion, garlic and other plants that grow underground', 'they consider a few animals holy', 'they eat only sattvic food'—these are some of the common misbeliefs that are widespread. The people spreading them are not common Hindus but they follow Vedic rituals and they are known to spread all sorts of religious misconceptions. The world will realize that we too are Hindu but we don't subscribe to Vedic rituals; we too have multiple food practices in this country but efforts are made to subsume these.

My book was first published on 10 February 2015 in Marathi. It was more highly reviewed and recognized in the English media as compared to the Marathi media. Initially many people came forward to offer to translate it into English. A publishing house showed keen interest but neither did they go ahead nor did I follow up.

I got a call from Suchismita from HarperCollins when I was still in Nagaland. She quickly confirmed the details and the work started immediately. I was already working on the third revised edition of my book, which came in handy for this translation. Shanta Gokhale was approached to work on this translation. Coincidentally, she was the first to write her views in English about my book. One more coincidence is that Shanta Gokhale suggested Bhushan Korgaonkar's name to HarperCollins India. Bhushan had curated a show about my book and was already a friend. It was easier for both of us to work together. I was happy that someone who had understood my book well, was now working on its translation. However, we come from different social backgrounds and hence I had to invite him home where he could see many unknown vegetables, farming equipment and many other 'rural' things. We had many rounds of discussions. I am deeply grateful to HarperCollins India for publishing this book in English, to make the international reader aware of 'our' food culture, globalize its reach and to end the misconceptions about Indian food culture. Lastly, I shall always remain indebted to Suchismita and Bhushan.

Shahu Patole

Eat and let eat!

When I first heard the title *Anna He A-purna Brahma*, the quip on the lines from a famous Marathi prayer caught my attention. The original words 'anna he purna brahma' means food is the complete truth, the eternal life-creating force. The prayer further asserts that consuming food is not just about filling your stomach but that it is a sacred act. Several generations of Marathis have grown up chanting this prayer before every meal. The title of the book, however, proclaimed that food is an incomplete reality. To me this had so many meanings and layers. It was this dark and deeply satirical take that pulled me towards the content instantly. Also, it drew the foodie in me, with my keen interest in food and its association with people, culture and region. Some of the recipes mentioned in this book were something that I had never even heard of. Particularly effective were the stories behind these recipes—sometimes funny, sometimes tragic but always thought-provoking. I found out that the writer, Shahu Patole, lives in Aurangabad and has a huge fan following on social media. His posts are as perspicacious as his book.

In 2016 I went to Aurangabad to meet Patole. There I was served a delectable meal cooked by him and eaten over a wide-ranging conversation about food, cuisines and the book. I immediately invited him to our studio in Mumbai for an exclusive interview as part of our monthly art-related event 'Baithak'. I personally curated this session, with Patole talking about his experiences with food, and actor Nandita Patkar reading out excerpts from the book and some of our patrons serving dishes they had cooked from the recipes in the book. The session was much loved and appreciated.

In May 2021, Shanta Gokhale asked me if I would like to translate this book into English. It brought back all the memories of that vibrant interview and I instantly accepted this proposal. The actual work of translation, however, was not as easy as curating the session. Although I was well-versed with a few dialects of Marathi, the book had a rich vocabulary related to farming and cooking that I was not entirely familiar with. Even the Marathi used in the literature of saints was not my forte. I was left with no choice but to visit Patole again—this time in his village in Osmanabad. This trip was immensely valuable as I got the opportunity to see first-hand all the equipment, most of the vegetables and the animal body parts used for cooking. Chats with Patole, his mother, brother, neighbours and friends were insightful and thoroughly enjoyable. The highlight, of course, was to see, touch, taste and smell all the food items and recipes from the book through the numerous meaty, mouth-watering and delightful meals we had at every step of the trip.

My friend and creative partner Kunal Vijayakar not only accompanied me on this trip but also helped in suggesting better terms and expressions to translate certain words, verses and phrases. Sandip Parulkar, Prashant Pagare and Madhavi Kulkarni worked on the difficult task of comparing the original text with the translation to make sure that nothing was left out. Working with editor Suchismita Ukil gave me an opportunity to learn a lot about the craft of translation. My sincere thanks to all of them.

I strongly believe in the principle of 'live and let live'. The book opened my eyes to the fact that this term applies to food as well. One must love and respect what people eat and respect others' food choices and let them eat what they have been eating without any shame or guilt.

Bhushan Korgaonkar

1

What about us?

Most newspapers and magazines frequently publish stories on cooking practices and recipes from various regions within India and abroad. Some exclusively provide foodies information on city-specific cuisines, gourmet restaurants and roadside eateries. Food shall prevail as long as humans exist. These food conversations will stop only with human extinction. In its heyday, All India Radio aired many food-related programmes. With the advent of television, people outside the metro cities began to 'see' food shows. The course completely changed with the arrival of private television channels, topped by exclusive food channels. Indigenous food culture and shows are shown on such foreign-owned channels. If you look at the books market in India, cookery and recipe books are clearly the bestsellers.

The one striking commonality in all this discourse in India is the continued undercurrent of classism and casteism. This subconscious mindset is deeply rooted in centuries of tradition. Nowadays, food blogs, Facebook groups, Instagram stories and YouTube channels are in vogue. This democratization of content has opened up possibilities for Dalits to share their food stories. Even then, they don't come forward to talk about their food culture, thanks to the sense of shame attached to their own food history and practices by the established casteist and classist narrative.

The recipes presented to the people through traditional literature in India and through the variety of contemporary mediums belong to the so-called upper classes in their respective regions. Moreover, the ingredients used for these recipes are accessible only to the affluent and the elite. Often, these ingredients are not even known to the masses, or not readily available. And if they are, they are simply not affordable for the common man. Often, people outside the peripheries of the upper class have never heard of nor tasted these ingredients, let alone the final recipes.

A large variety of recipes are presented through broadcast programmes and print media. That's all right; but how is it possible these dishes turn out to be delicious every single time? None of these preparations ever turn too salty, too spicy, too sweet, charred, insipid, unsavoury or simply unpalatable. The information about foreign recipes also belongs to the upper classes of the respective countries to which they belong. Not just that, but the choice of selected local ingrediets while explaining the methods of international and interstate recipes also pertain to the privileged sections of the society.

It is repeatedly said that Indian culture is embellished by its diversity. The theory of unity in diversity is relentlessly reinforced. Indian food culture is divided in the same hierarchy as that of Indian culture and social structure. The documented Indian social structure is known to have split at multiple levels for the last 2,500 years. In the Vedic period, it was divided into two categories: 'arya' (conquerors) and 'das' (the conquered). From there on, structure and social hierarchy were established.

Varnas were created. The varna system is a social stratification based on jaati (caste at birth). There were pre-determined professions that corresponded to each of the jaatis and subsequently to each of the varnas. The four basic varnas under this system are: Brahmins (priests, teachers, intellectuals), Kshatriyas (warriors, kings, administrators), Vaishyas (entrepreneurs, traders, farmers) and Shudras (workers, labourers, artisans). These varnas were believed to have emerged from different parts of God—e.g., Brahmins from the head of God, Kshatriyas from the hands, Vaishyas from the thighs and the Shudras from the feet. The rituals and diet of the four classes were also vastly different, and they still are.

According to the food culture and dietary patterns, Marathwada society is divided into five categories:

a. Special pure vegetarian (vishesh shuddha shakahari): Their daily diet does not use food items such as garlic, onions and ginger—these grow below the ground, and the plant is killed in the process of harvesting it, which is contrary to the dictum of non-violence. As an alternative to ginger, asafoetida from Afghanistan is used. This category observes Chaturmas (four months of abstinence with a special diet during this period).
b. Vegetarian (shakahari): This category similarly abstains from food items like onions, garlic and brinjal during Chaturmas. But for the remaining eight months, they use these items in their diet. Asafoetida is also used in their diet.
c. Mixed diet (mishrahari): This category is an exponent of vegetarianism. But they eat eggs and sometimes even meat stock. This category has always existed across all eras.
d. Non-vegetarian (mansahari): This is a category in which some groups turn vegetarian during the entire Chaturmas while others do so only during the month of Shravana (an auspicious month per the Hindu calendar, which falls during the monsoon season, usually between July and August). Eating meat by this group is not looked down upon by the vegetarian community. Furthermore, the vegetarians have some knowledge of the kind of meat people in this category would mainly eat.

    The people in this non-vegetarian group usually are the social elite or other upper-caste, upper-class Hindus—Kayastha, Rajput and other equivalent castes who belong to the Kshatriya varna, Vaishya or even some Brahmins such as Saraswat Brahmins, who are non-vegetarian. Their meat comes mainly from goat, lamb, chicken, peacock, wild boar, pigs, ducks, other wetland birds, fish, rabbits, turtles, deer and even, occasionally, monitor lizards; on some occasions they eat shrimp, crabs and the eggs of some birds. Additionally, this group abstains from eating meat on specific days of the week or month for religious observance or during a particular period as prescribed by religion.
e. Culture-compliant non-vegetarian (sanskruti-palak mansahari): Although Hinduism accounts for only four categories of people, there is a fifth one: Shudratishudra, or lowest of the low. Hinduism divides diets into three types (sattvic, rajasic, tamasic), and in terms of assigned professions there are four. The fifth category was relegated outside formal Hindu society. So, although this category was a part of the Indian social structure, there were no dietary restrictions on its members. However, there were strict rules about their social behaviour. In addition to the above four types of fare, their diet consisted of beef and buff (buffalo meat, as it is commonly referred to in India). Consuming discarded dead animals, domesticated animals and birds was not a taboo either. No religious gurus ever cared if people of this category observed the sacred days of non-vegetarian abstinence. Their food customs were despised and looked down upon by all other categories. The upper classes had neither time nor interest to find out what this category ate.

Those who own and influence the media, those who control the narrative and those who present food, largely belong to the first four categories. Through these platforms, they are constantly introducing India's rich, nourishing and diverse food culture to the world. They don't tire boasting about it. However, while beef and pork are talked about unabashedly, without any shame or disgust while introducing foreign delicacies, there is never an utterance about the consumption of similar meats by some of the groups in the Indian subcontinent, especially those who follow Hinduism. Bearing in mind the ancient history of this country, why don't they include non-vegetarian food as part of our primitive, age-old traditions? This country also has similarities with the rich food culture of European and African nations. Why are these writers tight-lipped about it? Do they feel that the cuisine of a region is defined and limited by the food culture of the upper classes? Or do they pretend that they have no knowledge about the food history of this fifth category?

What did the people outside the elite sphere eat every day? What do they eat today? What are their nourishments, delicacies, snacks and desserts? What festivals do they celebrate? What are the special meals prepared for festivals? What do they serve their guests? Why don't the writers, bloggers, columnists, filmmakers, etc., ever ask such simple questions?

Even if you talk just about Maharashtra, it is the same. What is palatable to the mainstream, upper-caste circles gets popular coverage and becomes the identity of the region itself. For example, the food culture of the Konkan region is narrowed down to rice, fish, crab, kulthache pithale (horse gram curry), fadfada

(colocasia curry), rice bhakri (roti or flat bread made of rice), mutton-vade (mutton curry with mixed-grain puris or fried bread).

The identity of regions of Marathwada is equated to particular dishes, all belonging to the upper-class, mainstream food group. Ghati equates to pithala bhakri (gram-flour curry and sorghum roti), khandeshi equates to bharit (mashed eggplant curry) and mande (sweet roti), varhadi equates to thecha (coarsely ground chillies and garlic)! Do they only eat thecha? Kolhapur equates to misal (a spicy snack of mixed legumes), pandhara rassa (mutton curry with a white gravy), tambada rassa (curry with a red gravy), and Maharashtra as a whole is summed up into puran poli (sweet roti made from split chickpeas, jaggery, wheat flour and oil), kataachi amti (spicy curry made with boiled split chickpeas), kande pohe (snack from flattened rice) and zunka bhakar (gram-flour curry and sorghum roti); that's all—the rest of the vast culinary landscape, including that of Dalit communities, is ignored.

Even today, a large number of people in Maharashtra eat chutney–bhakar (chutney and bhakri) or kordyas–bhakar or kalvan–bhakar (kordyas is a dry curry and kalvan, one with gravy) every day; or, when they can afford it, they consume the so-called religiously proscribed meats. They are born Hindus. Why is no one interested to know about their culture and customs and publish them or show them as 'special dishes' on their channels? Why do they think that there is nothing special or novel about this novel food culture? They are probably sitting so far and so high behind their social and cultural facades that they cannot see much beyond themselves. One sees numerous animals and birds wandering around in the villages, streets, gullies and backyards. What is their use in this social structure? Why are they commonly sheltered as pets—just for their company? Or are they a part of the people's diet? It would be rather naïve to assume that the woke writers and bloggers are oblivious to this system.

Food culture and literature

In the 1960s, rural literature found space in the world of Marathi literature; but this was limited to comedy and humour, rather than tracing the overall rural life. The portrayal of the settlements outside the village boundaries appeared only as superficial and shallow accounts in this literature. In the seventies, Dalit literature made its way into mainstream Marathi literature. Due to the lived-in experience of Dalit writers, for the first time the elite classes were able to fully recognize and acknowledge the existence of one of the classes belonging to their own social structure. Poverty, suffering and the eating habits of this class were always taken for granted by the upper classes. In the folk tales of the upper classes, stories about 'a poor Brahmin living in a village' were common. But in the same village, there were many Dalits living in abject poverty. This, however, was never acknowledged. The poor Brahmin was an exception so everyone went on writing about his poverty and tribulations. Dalit literature brought Dalit lives and lifestyles to the notice of the world for the first time. Dalit writing, especially autobiographies and poetry, was appreciated and celebrated by many elite Marathi readers for their 'passion' and were in 'fashion'.

But some elite writers frowned and grimaced at it. Rural (of course, the non-Dalit) writers were aware of all the village life and hierarchies. But they never talked about this class difference in their literature except as a passing reference. They never expressed the plight of Dalits in their literature.

But at the same time, elite writers and readers were facilitating discussions on Dalit literature. Because of this, people learnt about the village boundaries and life beyond these boundaries. They realized the dreadful conditions in which the Shudratishudra population has been living outside the village boundaries for centuries. Dalit autobiographies in Marathi were then translated into regional and foreign languages. People wrote their theses on this literature. Exclusive Dalit dictionaries were made. There were deliberations on Dalit vocabularies. Elite scholars authored books on Dalit literature. The term 'Dalit' is a Sanskrit word meaning scattered in places or divided. Does it also indicate crushed, overpowered, suppressed and exploited?

2

Inclusion and validation

Until the rise of Dalit literature in the 1970s, nowhere did the lower castes and classes find representation; be it in mythology or classical Sanskrit literature, bakhari (historical documents in Marathi), the literature of the saints or any such works. References of Maratha, Bahujan, Dalit and other nomadic, backward communities are found only as reproachful representations of the paradigms of their caste and food customs. Dalit literature was the first to take notice of, document and bring the life of commoners to the forefront. A significant yet largely unknown section of society, along with its culture, architecture, art and food customs, was thus introduced to the world. The grim reality of Dalit society painted in its literature was unsettling and scandalous to the uninitiated. Portrayals of daily life and food descriptions in this literature were yet another harsh culture shock for the world.

There was, however, no research-based in-depth writing on the food practices and food culture of the Dalits mentioned in Dalit literature. One can understand why the elite or non-Dalits never undertook such a study but even Dalit writers have not written about their food culture in any noteworthy detail. Non-Dalit readers had never heard of the dishes mentioned in Dalit autobiographies. As food was typically just a passing reference in these writings, detailed recipes or any significant information about those dishes was never provided by the Dalit writers. Even food enthusiasts and connoisseurs did not show any interest towards those dishes. The fact that non-vegetarian food is predominant in Dalit literature might be the reason behind this indifference. The non-Dalits from Hindu, Jain, Buddhist and other communities did not approve of such a diet. Moreover, people with such food habits were socially condemned. This may be one reason behind the apathy. Therefore, the false notion about Dalits that ‘they only eat meat’ may have been reinforced. Or, for those who were vaguely aware of the type of meat the Dalits ate, it must have been enough to quench their curiosity as it was broadly corroborated by Dalit literature in writing. Whatever be the reasons, it is well-established that Dalit food was not a desired topic of discourse.

The ‘who eats what’ charade

In all societies and cultures of Maharashtra, and indeed India, undue importance was given to what people ate rather than their social conduct. An individual’s eating practices played a vital role in determining their social status—governed by what they ate and what their ancestors ate. Even today, there is no significant difference in this. Food culture seems to be firmly aligned along caste and class divides. The origin and development of food culture according to the caste system and its fallacies is clearly evident. In Hinduism, the class system, caste system and food culture are the ‘three sides’ of the same coin.

The group at the top of the Indian social hierarchy are forceful advocates of vegetarianism. The pride and arrogance of that class is visible far and wide even today. This perhaps drives Dalit writers, thinkers, critics, leaders, servants, commoners, middle classes, lower classes, literates, illiterates and the underprivileged to constantly live with a sense of shame and guilt about their food. Dalits, who occupy a vital and robust position in all spheres of society in today’s Maharashtra, get uncomfortable about the topics of food habits and culture.

Dalit people who regularly and authoritatively examine culture, history, the caste system and social movements feel guilty, ashamed, scared and confused when their food customs and culture are discussed.

‘We don’t eat anything like that’—a phrase often heard in social conversations, spoken with an intent to sound casual. Until recently, when a Dalit man stepped out to buy mutton, if he met a non-Dalit acquaintance, he would always offer tea to the friend and deliberately mention that he was going to buy mutton. Also slipping into the conversation ‘how expensive mutton has become these days’ would make the point amply clear.

In the last few years, it has become more common for people to visit the homes of their Dalit friends for meals. Dalits make sure to buy mutton or chicken and prepare the dishes as if that’s their regular way. This causes the friends to be pleased at the ‘improved’ food habits, dispelling their long-persisting doubts and paving the way for their ‘trust’ and ‘affection’ to grow.

Original Dalit castes

The ‘original castes’ amongst the Dalits in Maharashtra include Chambhar, Dhor, (erstwhile) Mahar and Mang, in that hierarchical order, with Chambhar at the top. They were mentioned in the same order in the social hierarchy. The first two castes, Chambhar and Dhor, did not consume ‘forbidden’ meat. Also, they observed untouchability against the other two castes, Mahar and Mang. Moreover, the Mahars, the third in the rank, kept their distance from the Mangs. Intercaste marriage between them was inconceivable. Even food-sharing followed hierarchical norms, which was only top to bottom.

There were seven subcastes in the erstwhile Mahar caste—the Mahars converted to Buddhism at Dr B.R. Ambedkar’s behest. There were separate panchayats for each subcaste. The head of their caste panchayat was called the thete or shete. Somvanshi or Somanshi were the priestly class among the Mahars, followed by Barke, Ladwan, Bawne, Zade Bawne, Andhawan or Adhawan, and Kosare. Rayandan or Rayrand was a fringe subcaste of Mahar who were considered bahuroopi (polymorphic) as they would entertain with mimicry and disguise. These subcastes shared food but marrying between subcastes was not allowed. After conversion to Buddhism, these distinctions have disappeared and they are known as nav-baudha (neo-Buddhist), which is again a casteist appellation, used to differentiate them from old-time Buddhists.

Mangs, too, had subcastes based on the regions they belonged to, such as Matang, Mang, Mini Mang, Mini Madig, Dankhani Mang, Mang Mahashi, Mang Garodi, Mang Garudi and Madari. Over time, the differences have ceased to exist, and everyone labels themselves as ‘Mang’. However, the Mang Garodi subcaste still exists. They are semi-nomadic. They shave buffaloes, shape bullocks’ hooves and nail shoes on them. Another caste is Volhar, similar to Mang. Volhars made shoes for Dalits. The Mang subcastes, too, would share food (*roti vyavahar*) but wouldn’t intermarry (*beti vyavahar*).

During the Yadav era, a caste is mentioned in the Devagiri region, known as Kure Mang. The Kure Mang were weavers. The cloth they wove was also bought by the upper classes. The Kure Mang have disappeared.

Dakkalwar is a separate beggar subcaste of the Mang caste. Dakkalwar traditionally would ask for alms only from Mangs. They would sing songs praising Mangs, keep records of their family trees and give them the respect which they usually wouldn’t get from anyone. In return Mangs would give them food, grains and so on. The Dakkalwar speak a mix of Telugu, Kannada and Marathi.

The Mang caste has its own independent code language, which is fast diminishing over time. These are special words and phrases that form a code to allow Mangs to share information securely without leaking it to outsiders who might be listening. It was a form of self-protection for a marginalized and oppressed community.

Jangam is a backward caste that performs priestly duties, such as funeral rites, for Mangs in the border areas near Karnataka. The Jangam caste was given the right by Mahatma Basaveshwar.

There are two major types in the Dhor caste. In areas influenced by the Lingayat community, they are known as Kakkaya and in other areas they are known as Dhor. In the first intercaste marriage that Mahatma Basaveshwar, a famous saint, performed in the eleventh century, the groom belonged to the Kakkaya caste and the bride was Brahmin.

As much as there are similarities in the social strata and food culture of these four main Dalit castes, there are some striking differences too. In the Mahar caste, pork was not only strongly forbidden but it was also

considered despicable. Mangs were allowed to eat pork but for them the meat of horses was forbidden. The Mangs may have become Hindus when they worked as slaves during the Vedic times. Aryans engaged the Mangs to work in their stables. Historian V.K. Rajwade (in *Samagra Sahitya*) notes that in the palaces and British platoons, horses were groomed only by Mangs. It is possible that due to this intimate association with horses, their meat may have been off limits. References of horse meat consumption in the Indian subcontinent are not found anywhere in the medieval times. This is probably because horses were expensive and useful in wars. From 2000 to 1000 BCE, a list of animals that were sacrificed in the yajnas (religious fires) was made. It included horses in addition to a few birds, goat, sheep, bulls, castrated bullocks and unproductive cows. Perhaps horses and Mangs shared an age-old past together.

Over time, the intensity of intercaste discrimination within the four castes has reduced. This book focuses on the food culture of the Mang and erstwhile Mahar castes, which is fundamentally different from that of the other two (upper) Dalit castes. The purpose of this book is to chronicle the food culture of only these two (lower) castes.

Alutedars and balutedars

'Farming is best; next is business and last is being employed by someone else' was a popular saying. Agriculture was at the heart of the Indian rural economy. Farmers needed assistance from many others to handle all the tasks of farming.

Work was divided on the basis of caste in each village. Balutedar and alutedar were hereditary service providers in the villages of Maharashtra. The castes whose help was most crucial were called balutedars, of which there were twelve to fourteen categories in a village. The word balutedar means the one who holds balute. Balute is the right to a share in the crops in exchange for work. Balutedars' work is directly relevant and crucial for farming and farmers. Those whose help was not as crucial or who were dispensable were called alutedars, of which there were about fourteen of a total of seventeen or eighteen subcastes. Every artisan or worker whose job is not directly essential to farming is an alutedar. They, too, would get a share in crops. But this was given more as an understanding and a fair price (or sometimes simply as alms) and not as a right, as in the case of balutedars. They had a complex barter system under which a fixed share of crops and/or cash was paid by consumers in the village in exchange for their services

The balutedars included the following: Patil (village heads, in charge of law and order, tax collection and administration), Kulkarni (in charge of accounts and documentation), Chougula (or Mokasa, assistant to Patil), Joshi (astrologers and priests), Gurav (temple-keepers, priests only in the absence of Brahmins), Mahar (responsible for sanitation and security), Sutar (carpenters), Lohar (blacksmiths), Chambhar (leatherworkers), Kumbhar (potters), Nhavi (barbers), Sonar (goldsmiths), Parit (launderers) and Koli (fisherfolk). Their share in crops was decided based on their utility to the farmers and to the overall village system. The balutedars were also known as Kaaru, meaning 'those who do (essential work)'.

Alutedars were also known as Naaru, which is just a rhyming word to contrast with kaaru, meaning 'those who don't do (essential work)'. Alutedars are service providers or entertainers to the entire community. They included Teli (oil-pressers and traders), Tamboli (betel leaf traders), Sali (cloth weavers), Sangar (shepherds who weave rugs and blankets from sheep wool), Shimpi (tailors), Mali (vegetable, fruits and flower growers), Gondhali (religious folk artists who play sambal, an instrument, and sing hymns to goddesses and tell stories), Davri (a nomadic tribe that begs, usually seen with a type of damaru), Bhaat (who praise kings or higher caste people through their songs), Gosavi (nomadic tribe that lives on begging), Jangam (priests from Lingayat sect), Mulana (goat butchers, masjid upkeep), Vajantri (this is not a caste but a profession: any group that plays instruments in religious ceremonies, weddings or even in funerals), Ghisadi (nomadic blacksmith tribe), Kalvat (matriarchal entertainment community that follows Islam), Bhoi (lifting palanquins and fishing), and the Potaraj (male religious entertainers).

In villages where there were no Mahars, Mangs were made balutedar and would do all the tasks usually assigned to Mahars, in addition to their primary occupation that included making ropes, making brooms,

castrating bulls, shoeing bullocks, playing percussion instruments, etc. Mahars and Mangs were village entertainers as well.

All the villages had a similar demographic structure. In the centre were the houses of the Patil and the landlord farmers, Kulkarni, Joshi, other farmers and all castes that were touchable. Near the border were the houses of Chambhars, Dhors and other balutedars and alutedar castes. To the east of the village, outside its border, lived Mahars and Mangs. They were kept outside because, firstly, they were considered untouchable and secondly because they ate beef and buff. They would dispose of dead animals.

Chambhar and Dhor were considered untouchable by the upper-caste village. Chambhar and Dhor considered Mahars and Mangs untouchable and Mahars considered Mangs untouchable.

During the Durga Devi famine in the Deccan, which lasted twelve years (1396–1407), Vithu Mahar, a Dalit, broke into the royal granary in Mangalwedha (Solapur district, near the border between Maharashtra and Karnataka). He robbed the grains stored there and distributed them to the needy, irrespective of their caste. The local police officer, Mamledar Damajipant, was blamed for this. Vithu Mahar came forward and confessed in order to save Damajipant.

This must have been a shock for the upper castes. They would have feared contamination from eating food received from an untouchable man. To quell this fear, the writers and narrators of the time probably spread the story that Lord Vitthal himself took the form of a Mahar, and stole and distributed the grains. The legend says Vitthal went to the court (which included a council of powerful Brahmins) in Bidar (now in Karnataka, but an old centre of administration for many rulers), took the blame and also compensated the king for his losses. (Lord Vitthal is a dark-complexioned god from Maharashtra who is much loved by all castes.)

According to this legend, Vitthal/Vithu Mahar appealed for some tasks to be reserved for his community and for rights instead of asking anything for his personal gain. This is the famous ‘Charter of Fifty-two Rights for Mahars’ or ‘Fifty-two Watans’. This charter was approved by a group of influential Brahmins at Paithan, which was known as Dakshinkashi or the Kashi of the south.

Another legend about this charter is somewhat different. According to it, when the king of Bidar, Barid Shah, went to war, he entrusted the protection of his harem to Sidnak Mahar, a dutiful servant. When the king returned after winning the war, someone made allegations about Sidnak’s character. When the king asked Sidnak for proof of his loyalty in the court, Sidnak reminded him about a box he had given the king before he left for the war. ‘Please, could you open it, sir,’ Sidnak pleaded. The box was opened in the court. There was a penis wrapped in a piece of cloth. It was Sidnak’s penis. Pleased with his loyalty, the king granted him a wish. It was then that Sidnak demanded the fifty-two rights for the Mahar caste. Since then, the Mahar caste became the twelfth caste amongst the balutedars. Whatever be the reason, the Mahar must be the only caste in the world to get fifty-two rights in a system. That, too, sanctioned by a Muslim ruler and approved by a group of orthodox Brahmins.

According to the balutedari system and the fifty-two rights, the Mahar had the right to take dead farm animals from their place of death to the plot of land reserved for their disposal. The balutedar Mahar households of the village would do this, or in their absence, Mangs. A separate piece of land was reserved in the common grassland for disposal of dead cattle. The term hadki-hadawala (place of bones) is still used for such a place.

The skin of the dead animal belonged to the owner of the animal. It would be handed over to the Dhor family or to Chambhars in the absence of Dhors, who would treat it with salt to preserve it. If the meat of the dead animal was edible and belonged to the list of permitted meats, the prime portions would go to the owner-landlord’s house. The rest was distributed as per social hierarchy, the Mangs being the last.

Animals which were considered sacred and godly became unholy after their death. This inferior and unclean work had to be done mainly by these two castes—Mahar and Mang. According to a story in the *Leelacharitra* (a biography of Chakradhar Swamy by Mhaimbhat and the first book published in Marathi, in 1278) a dead bull that had died in a Mahadeo (Shiv) temple was brought to life by Sant Shri Chakradhar. This facilitated the passage of the animal out of the temple. What does it mean? That no Mahar or Mang lived in that village (which was not possible); or that the temple would have gotten defiled by the entry of a Mahar and Mang to remove the carcass?

Why did beef and pork become part of the diet of only these communities?

As per Vedic tradition, cows and bullocks are important animals. On the occasions of yagnas, goats, sheep, horses, bullocks, oxen, infertile cows and some kinds of birds were used as sacrifice. But buffaloes and pigs are not mentioned in this holy sacrifice. In Hinduism, the formerly permitted practice of eating the meat of cows and bullocks gradually turned around to become an extremely anti-religious and socially unacceptable act over time. However, it continued to be a sizeable part of the diet of the Mahar and Mang castes for centuries. It would be interesting to know why it became a taboo for the upper castes and not for these two communities: something that is regarded as unholy, anti-religious, anti-cultural and forbidden for the majority is acceptable for the marginalized in the same religion.

Why didn't the religious gurus stop them from eating this if it was such a sin? Did the communities stick to this diet by choice or did the system force them to eat it? Perhaps natural calamities, food shortages, droughts, heavy rainfall and dependence of these communities on others for food may have been some of the reasons. However, the key question persists—why should this be the fate of these two castes? They were the cleaning servants of the village. Were they trapped in this cultural and religious net so that they would continue with their tasks without raising their voice? So that they wouldn't complain and would go on doing the filthy jobs? It is clear that it was imposed by the varna system, the social stratification system that divided people on the basis of their caste. They were paying for the sins of a past birth. They were living this life for the sake of atonement. Not a single saint or godman came to their rescue to take them out of their supposedly despicable food culture, discouraged them from eating it or provided them with an option of alternative nutritious, simple food. No god assumed any avatar to save them.

Legend has it that Lord Vitthal descended to the reserved space in the forest allotted for carcass disposal to help Sant Chokhoba Mahar clean up the dead animals. Chokhoba was a great devotee of Vitthal but he was never allowed to enter Vitthal's temple as Dalits were banned from doing so. So, probably even a god had to come to this impure place in the forest so as to prevent a Mahar from entering his temple. What happened with Sant Janabai was no different. Vitthal helped her with arduous chores like grinding, winnowing and so on, but she remained a slave till the end of her life.

Before the Common Era, a powerful wave of Jainism and Buddhism had moved and shaken our subcontinent. They were strong advocates of vegetarianism. Fearing that the Hindu religion would become extinct, the upper classes turned away from non-vegetarian food and did their best to follow the path of vegetarianism. They started inventing many techniques, stories and tricks to convince the ignorant population to turn to vegetarianism. However, due to the basic human instinct to resist anything imposed from above, they have not been successful in converting the entire Hindu population to vegetarianism. The movement to create a vegetarian society is still going on in one way or another.

References to animal slaughter and sacrifice in the eighth century ce are found in Sanskrit literature and plays. Let alone the yagna era before the ninth century, but even recently in Soma Yuga, goats were sacrificed to satisfy the deities so that they could grant a physically fulfilled life to one's family members and also lead them to salvation. Goats' mouths were tied shut and they were tortured until they died. Musical instruments were played loudly to drown out their cries. After the death of the animal, mantras were chanted for the consolation of its soul: No here thou diest not, thou art not injured; only by fair paths to the gods thou goest.

After this, the goat's body was cut up while chanting relevant mantras.

This is a description from a very recent twentieth-century pilgrimage to Wai, in Satara district, witnessed by R.B. Joshi and narrated in his book *Majal Darmajal*.

According to *Manusmruti* (5:56), 'There is no sin or guilt in eating meat, drinking alcohol and having sex. These are natural tendencies to satiate bodily needs, though abstention can lead to great rewards.'

Self-proclaimed watchdogs of culture and the current brand of culture chroniclers need to update their knowledge by studying why yagnas were performed, who performed them, for whom and what all would be sacrificed in fire in the form of offerings to god. Is it not right that these two communities have preserved the ancient customs and food culture of yagna practitioners till the twenty-first century in Maharashtra? They did

not give it up like others with changing times. They should be proud of this and everyone today needs to know this relevant and important information.

As mentioned earlier, Jainism and Buddhism laid the foundation of vegetarianism and rejected the Vedas and orthodoxy. They did not stop at knowledge transmission of their revolutionary principles but also made sure that they percolated down to the common people. Vedic followers would not have been afraid of them if they were not so effective.

The roots of the lazy tradition of Chaturmas in Hinduism cannot be traced. But it is quite possible that it had been inspired by Jainism. Because in Jainism, Chaturmas is observed by everyone. On the other hand, Hindus have varied approaches of observing it. Physically strenuous, torturous things such as fasting, abstinence, etc., were probably not so common in yagnik (old Hindu) traditions. Hindus, especially the ones leading a privileged life, have created many loopholes in the name of religion and tradition.

Accordingly, farmers are supposed to follow diet restrictions in only one out of four months, Shravan, by giving up non-vegetarian food. Manual labourers and workers are exempt, probably because they never have enough food or money, so they can eat non-vegetarian food whenever they can afford it. If they are really god-fearing, they can observe a couple of auspicious days such as Mondays, Saturdays and Ekadashi (the eleventh day from a new moon or a full moon) of pure vegetarianism in this month. This is a shrewd way of making sure that farmers and workers keep working throughout the year without bothering about religious rituals, fasting and abstinence. Otherwise, who will feed the lazy upper-caste Hindus?

This system is followed even today. A certain class will observe abstinence from certain foods as this period is considered tough for digestion. But during the same period, people who cannot even pronounce the word ‘indigestion’ and ‘dyspepsia’ are exempt from this abstinence. When both are Hindus, then why different rules? The answer was not given. It never will be. Because the advocates of the concept of Chaturmas also believe in the chaturvarna system. The progressive revolutionary changes of Jainism and Buddhism were not accepted by them. It was just a selective acceptance of things such as vegetarianism and Chaturmas, which suited them. With this, they had another tool to accentuate the hierarchy of caste, and that was through food practices. In this process of constant judging of everyone based on what they ate, the two communities, Mahar and Mang, who were already downtrodden and marginalized, became the target of further ridicule and disgust.

A social pattern of imitating the speaking, eating, sartorial and behavioural styles of rulers and the upper classes has always existed in all the times, places and cultures around the world. The idea is to copy something desirable and ideal—it is aspirational. If one cannot be in that class, at least this way they can experience how it feels to be of that class. This process of upward mobility has been going on forever.

Originally, the Hindu religion and culture never advocated vegetarianism. But when they felt the threat of Jainism and Buddhism in the form of the strong emergence of vegetarianism, they too started following and promoting it. This resulted in a false sense of pride in their own food habits, which were regarded as sattvic, holy and superior, and what other people ate as tamasic, unholy, inferior and impure. Thus began a religious and cultural ‘terrorism’. Even today, this vegetarianism (and also the puritan language) of upper-caste Hindus is a nuisance to many.

Upper-caste Hindus are divided into those who observe Chaturmas and those who observe only Shravan, during which a strict vegetarian diet is to be followed. A religion having vegetarianism as its core value, with all-vegetarian followers, does not necessarily need to proselytize vegetarianism. Why do they continue doing so even today? They have also come up with different tactics to convert people to vegetarianism such as Kashtha mala or Tulshichi mala (tulsi necklace), which is made of wooden beads or seeds of sacred basil, strung on a holy thread. Those who wear it cannot eat non-vegetarian food. But it is common knowledge that some such people remove the holy necklace from their necks and keep it safely on a hook whenever they crave non-vegetarian food. Are such cravings psychological or genetic?

What does this have to do with Muslims?

Not much. A ludicrous and illogical argument put forth is that ‘after the arrival of the Muslims, these two castes started eating beef because of their regular association and influence’. The very nature of the Mahars’ and Mangs’ assigned duties resulted in their meat-eating habits, long before Muslims arrived in India. Also, why did they continue eating pork if they were so influenced by Islam? Whoever entered our country from the northwest would either be viewed as an intruder or an outlander. The year 2021–22 marks the thousandth anniversary of Mahmud Ghazni’s invasion from Sindh of the coast of Gujarat. After 1270 ce, Muslims started invading Maharashtra from the north. Amongst them, the invasion of Alauddin Khilji in 1294 was the first successful one. The west coast of Maharashtra was familiar with Christian and Arabic Muslim traders. Sufi saints had started travelling to the south. These two castes were already living with their ‘insignificant’ food culture during this time. Their independent food culture was evolving outside the village boundaries in line with primal human and animal instincts.

Introduction of the Dalit Cuisine

In every food culture, the availability of local ingredients, and the look, aroma, taste and preparation and preservation styles continuously evolve. Similarly, varied cultures were evolving and developing in Maharashtra according to caste, class and creed. However, Maharashtra had to wait much longer to get introduced to the neglected food culture of Dalits. This happened only when Dalit literature was produced. Till then people only had a faint idea that they ‘eat something terribly different’. Besides, there was this assumption by the upper castes that ‘these folks are surviving on our leftovers’, so what could really be that great about their food culture? What was so special that they could be cooking in their kitchens? Not even social scientists or scholars have documented the fact that not only the upper castes but the Dalits too prepared vegetarian food, and their styles and ways were extremely localized, organic and close to mother nature.

One can imagine how despicable and taboo the homemade food of these castes would be in such a supposedly ‘cultured’ and ‘tolerant’ environment where even their shadow was considered contaminating. What could you expect from people who regarded these castes as untouchable? The Brahmins who used to come to perform the nuptial rites in a Mang household would recite the wedding mantras in a hurried manner, maintaining social and physical distancing norms. They would also perform a ‘shortcut’ ceremony by skipping many rituals and accept only ‘dry rations’ and no cooked meals. They would sprinkle holy water on the coins or paper currency offered before accepting it. Dry rations consisted of wheat, rice, pulses, dry dates, coconut, turmeric, betel nut—clearly an excessive expense for the host. They used jowar grains mixed with turmeric as confetti for showering the couple. (As per norms, rice is considered sacred and used as confetti in all other communities. But jowar was cheaper.) Brahmins never performed nuptial ceremonies for Mahars who had a designated subcaste amongst their own community to act as priests. That’s why Mang people took pride in the fact that Brahmins themselves blessed their weddings. All these traditions are still in practice.

There was no dowry system in the Mang community. (This system did not exist in any lower castes and nomadic tribes.) On the contrary, it was customary to give something in the form of food grains to the girl’s parents. Similar to a common practice in other Hindu castes, marriages within the same bloodline or genealogical chart with the same totem or same surname were prohibited. Also, marriages of the eldest children were barred. The loophole found was to give the eldest son or daughter in adoption to someone else so that they no longer remain the eldest. Meetings to fix weddings would extend over a long time. If the proposal was from a village where the other party didn’t have any friends or relatives, then such proposals were scanned and screened painstakingly. If it was a proposal through one’s own relations, then such meetings would be a mere formality that ended with a meal, and usually puran polis were served. Then they would talk about monetary exchanges. After that, when the marriage was fixed, a ceremony of ‘breaking of betel nut’ would be performed. They broke the betel nuts manually or with a stone. No tools were used to break them, as it was considered to bring difficulties in married life. Most of the weddings were held in the groom’s home, unlike other Hindus where it was at the bride’s home.

In recent times, the urban trend of printing wedding cards was too expensive for many and hence, traditionally, the wedding guests were invited personally or through a messenger. One would visit the guests' homes and put kunku (vermilion powder) on the door along with offering a couple of rice grains mixed with a pinch of haldi-kunku. Guests living far away were sent a postcard if sending a messenger was not feasible.

To fix the wedding date, they would go to the shrine of the village deity and finalize the date and the precise auspicious time, that is, the muhurta. There was a scramble for financial arrangements as the wedding date approached closer. The goats or a couple of small ornaments in the house were sold. They also used to work for farmers for the whole year to generate additional funds in the form of loans and advances. Sometimes a kind farmer would help by giving food grains. Then they would rush to the nearest market for wedding shopping, mainly for clothes. The older men and women of the house and from the community would do the main task of selection. The shopping consisted of the bride's saris, the groom's outfit, shoes, some customary wedding ornaments made from fresh flowers or thick paper, and also gifts for select guests in the form of clothes, caps and towels.

The groom would not go to the bride for the wedding. It was considered demeaning. Friends and relatives would come to help in the wedding preparations, right from putting up the shamiana (a big tent) to building the dais. Before the wedding, bangle-makers were invited to make at least five bangles for every married lady in the family. If there was a little more money, the bride was given more expensive bangles to wear (reshmi karla—a type of green bangle). The bangle-makers did not observe untouchability.

Before the wedding, a bullock-cart was borrowed from well-wishers or a kind farmer and a covering built over it, to bring the bride to the groom's home for the haldi ceremony. In this ceremony, women applied turmeric paste with mango leaves on the forehead, shoulders, hands and feet of the groom. When the bride arrived, the same ritual was performed with her.

On the eve of the wedding, the ladies in the groom's house used to make a sweet dish called shidori. They would knead the dough of wheat flour. Then the chapatis would be prepared with fillings of sanjora, or semolina and jaggery. Sometimes sanjora was made of dried jowar and jaggery. The number of shidoris depended on the number of relatives the bride had. In addition, at least one shidori was given to every woman who helped in making them. Shidoris were stored carefully overnight in a clean and airy pot. A small piece of shidori was kept along with a piece of coal to ward off evil spirits. The next day, one or two men would leave in a bullock-cart to the bride's village. This was carefully timed according to the distance to the bride's house.

The groom's people would hand over these shidoris to the bride's mother. She would call for all the ladies among the close relatives. The number of shidoris would be counted and at least one shidori was handed over to each household. Sometimes the shidoris ran short or someone would get missed out. Such a trivial matter would blow up into huge misunderstandings, resulting in fights, and families would stop talking to each other for years. The bride's family would also make shidoris and send them along with the bride when she left for the haldi ceremony to the groom's house accompanied by a couple of elderly ladies and young girls of her own age. She wore the new sari bought for her and then was made an offering of wheat, coconut, dry dates, betel nut and turmeric. She was also wrapped in a white shawl which covered her entire body like a veil.

On the way the bullock-cart stopped at every village boundary and a piece of shidori or coconut was placed as an offering to the village deity. When the bride got out of the bullock-cart, a piece of bhakri (sorghum roti or flat bread) would be circled over her while chanting prayers and thrown away in the direction from which she had come. This was a ritual to get rid of the evil eye. Her stay was arranged in a relative's house in the groom's village. The haldi ceremony would start at nightfall. There would be long-winded songs on haldi:

'*Jambuji maalyana halad laawili* [Jambuji Mali applied the turmeric]'. This is how the song starts and describes how Jambuji Mali would boil, dry and grind the turmeric, sell it, and people would apply it on the bride and groom; so, in a way, Jambuli Mali himself applied the turmeric. This would be sung in a monotonous loop over and over. (The name of Jambuji Mali is found in the interpretation of the Ramayana written by Sant Eknath. He was the son of Prahasta, head minister of Lanka. His name is mentioned in many other versions of the epic and also in the original Valmiki Ramayana. What could be the connection between a haldi ceremony in Marathwada and Jambuji Mali from Sri Lanka?

The ceremony would go on for three to five days. Then the bride and groom would publicly take a bath together with their clothes on. They also rinsed their mouths and spat this water on each other; sometimes they would chew betel leaf and spit the juice. There were fun games that the bride and the groom would play together, such as 'hide-and-seek with a betel nut'. All these traditions were designed and intended as icebreakers.

On the wedding day, the groom would go to the Hanuman temple on foot or on a bicycle. Mangs were not allowed to sit near the temple so the groom would sit outside. Men from both sides would meet and greet each other with hugs. The procession with a musical band would start from this place to the wedding venue. Jowar mixed with turmeric would be distributed as confetti as the marriage took place.

People with a bit of extra money would also do a ritual of Jagran Gondhal. This was done to appease the gods and goddesses. The sacrifice of goats is essential for this. Many times, due to poverty, the pending Jagran Gondhal of the father was combined with the son's wedding. Jagran Gondhal is a ritual performed to pacify the family deity by inviting the Gondhali artists, who sing and dance and put up an entertaining act full of religious and witty stories through the whole night.

The wedding lunch was served to the men first and then to the women. The mothers of the bride and groom would fast on the wedding day. Women guests would bring their own utensils for making chapatis and puris. Men would knead the dough. If the family had enough money, they would make bundi, a sweetmeat made of gram flour and sugar; otherwise, it was sanja, made of semolina and jaggery. Rice, bundi or sanja, brinjal curry, puris or chapatis and, if possible, a thin dal would be on the menu.

The Backyard

Socially, the lower castes did not have any access to the homes of the upper castes. They would be allowed into the backyard or through a separate door for cleaning the area where the cattle were housed. They could at most get a glimpse of the interiors from the main door. Access to the kitchen was impossible. But they were given the excess food, sometimes leftover and stale food where the decaying process had just begun. The original taste of the food was rarely available for their enjoyment. The only exception was festival days. On such occasions, one could guess what ingredients were used in it. They could only guess because they did not have the freedom to ask for the recipes. Even if someone dared to ask, there was no guarantee that it would be graciously shared. There was neither any consideration shown by the upper castes, nor was there any courage to ask amongst the lower castes.

However, if at all any transfer of food was possible, it was from the upper castes to lower castes and never the other way. There are many such examples. Originally upper-caste foods such as puran poli, shira (semolina and sugar or jaggery), shikaran (bananas mashed in milk and sugar), waran (plain dal), amtya (spicy dals and curries), shewaya (vermicelli), sandage (sun-dried nuggets of pulses and vegetables), nakhule (nakhule is similar to pasta, made from wheat flour, using the nails—nakh is nail, botave is similar to pasta, made from wheat flour, using the fingers—bot is finger), papad, kurdaya (fried crispies made of wheat or rice), various types of pickles, chutneys, kheers, sabzis percolated down to the lower castes, who made modifications in the recipes based on ease and availability of ingredients.

Although the names of these recipes are the same, the taste would differ from caste to caste. Certain condiments or ingredients were not easily available to the lower castes. For example, asafoetida, brought by the original migrants from Persia and Afghanistan, is used by the upper castes of Maharashtra. Originally the upper-caste vegetarians and Jains started using asafoetida as an alternative to ginger and it became an integral part of their cooking. Even rock salt and black salt were available only to the upper castes. In places far away from the sea, sea salt was not available and rock salt from mines was also in the hands of the upper castes. It was expensive and not easy to procure. Later, when transport facilities improved, salt from the sea may have been brought to places inland. Hence, as it became easily available, possibly everyone, including the lower-castes, adopted sea salt in their daily diet. Rock salt remained only in special diets on fasting days of the upper castes.

Jokes were made by lower castes about asafoetida and rock salt, used mainly by the upper castes. (Dalits believed that asafoetida causes erectile dysfunction. Also, people suffering from flatulence use asafoetida and rock salt as medicines to expel gas. So, it followed that people consuming these things farted all the time and were sexually weak!)

The lower castes do not add sugar or jaggery in any savoury preparations, nor do they use tamarind, something which is very common in the upper castes to balance tastes. Lower-caste women were working women who had no time to differentiate between plain dal and special dal tadka (tempered lentils). Seasoning, styling and so on was considered frivolous and foolish. Even curry leaves have only recently found their way into lower-caste kitchens.

The social walls of caste and class were so strong that it was impossible for the upper castes to know about the food culture of the lower castes. As mentioned earlier, food cooked by the lower castes was forbidden to the upper castes. This reality still exists. Due to social reforms, many people from the lower castes got educated and started working for the government and in the private sector. Some of them have climbed up the social ladder. Some have become (mentally) middle class. Even so, from my experience, a visit by an upper-caste person for a meal makes them feel elated and favoured. Even the upper-caste Marathas share the same happiness and gratitude if anyone superior to them in the caste hierarchy visits them for a meal.

As mentioned earlier, the food culture of the upper castes and classes has been labelled and accepted as the food culture of the entire society, region and state. This has been done by scholars, researchers and experts in all eras. Naturally, the food culture of other marginalized social groups has been ignored or ridiculed. As a result, to outsider scholars, the food culture of that particular society or region appears homogeneous. The language of this elite class is also considered the standard language of the entire society. This means superiority assigned to a class is extended to its food and language as well. This results in dominance of the food culture and language of these groups. This has always been the case and is true even today. Only with time will we know if it will continue into the future.

In this context, let us examine an important and representative case of intercaste marriage. In such cases, the food culture of the spouse who belongs to a higher caste prevails in the house. It happens quite automatically—because of the inferiority complex of the lower castes about their food habits. If a girl comes from a vegetarian food culture, and she starts eating non-vegetarian food, it is appreciated by her new family. But rarely is she pressured to switch to non-vegetarian food. If she chooses to remain vegetarian, her choice is accepted amicably. Rightfully so.

But often the reverse is not true. If a Dalit girl is married into an upper-caste house, she learns to cook their food, and usually avoids her own culinary style. In such households, a mixed culture of the girl eating non-vegetarian food and others eating vegetarian food doesn't get established. Vegetarianism prevails. They are never encouraged to demonstrate their own food styles even once. On the other hand, girls from higher castes generally continue to cook in their own styles and never really bother to learn their husband's food culture.

3

Starvation and survival

Most of the world's cultures originated and developed on the banks of rivers and other water bodies. India is no exception. Most villages, towns and cities in Maharashtra have grown near streams, rivers and lakes. Usually, these human settlements were outside the floodplains of these water bodies. The use of water in rural areas depended on the number of available sources. Local conditions and social hierarchy determined who would use which source and in what way. First preference was given to the villagers, then outsiders and that too according to caste and class. The ghats (steps leading to the river) were built upstream on the river. Access depended on caste and class. The gradient of the river represented the gradient of caste hierarchy as well. The highest point was reserved for upper castes and hierarchy was followed along the river down the stream. This way the cleanest water was available exclusively to the most powerful ones.

Ideas of cleanliness varied from region to region and village to village. At most places, the daily routine of bathing, soaking various shrubs and vines for making ropes, washing clothes, utensils, even soiled clothes, bathing animals such as cows and buffaloes, was carried out in rivers. Very often people defecated near rivers and later washed their rears and hands at the river. Children's soiled diaper cloths were washed at the same place for reuse. Children's faeces would float on the water and go down the river. (According to Ayurveda, floating faeces of human beings is considered a sign of a healthy digestive system.) The people of lower castes used to dig small ditches for seepage water near the river or water sources to avoid drinking this dirty water.

Where there was no naturally flowing water, the caste differences became even more evident. Many villages had small or big wells. The use of these wells was also determined by caste. Some rich households would construct sturdy wells for their exclusive use. If the village well was large with many pulleys to draw water, then the pulleys were also assigned to certain castes. But untouchables were not allowed to go near any of these wells. Even though the source of ground water was single, once sourced for distribution, it became a symbol of discrimination. How dare the lower castes extract water from sources reserved for upper castes? Sometimes they were allowed to have their own wells but it wasn't so easy and affordable for them. The Dalits with no access to any water source would go to the village well to request water. 'Merciful' people would pour them water from afar. People giving the water appeared to feel they had done a noble deed. Farm wells were no exception to these rules of untouchability. Water was such a rare commodity for the lower castes that it was rationed and prioritized meticulously. It was used for cooking and drinking first. Other important uses such as personal hygiene and laundry were met only after this.

Rich people kept manservants to fetch water from rivers or wells. In some villages, Koli or Bhoi people (communities that worked in fishing and manual transportation respectively) used to fetch water in leather bags or waterskins. They would transport these bags on male buffaloes. After the arrival of vets and injections, some smart villagers coined a new proverb: 'The buffalo's ill and feeble, and the bag's getting the needle', meaning instances of useless, misplaced help.

The bag to carry water was made of leather and was made by the lower castes. The task of digging wells was done by labourers of any caste. Untouchability was not followed while the digging and construction work was on. Though once they hit water, untouchability kicked in. Before the proper inauguration of the well, the labourers would usually fetch out all the water and let fresh water seep in. Then they would fill a bucket with the fresh water, take it home along a musical procession, perform a puja at home and provide a

feast to people. Only then would the water become ‘sacred’ for the upper-caste owners and ‘prohibited’ to the lower castes. However, every well wasn’t so lucky to have undergone all these purification processes and feasts. Farm wells had to be operated by labourers from any caste who knew the technicalities. Everything was manual and had to be done with the help of bulls. After automation, although the task became simpler, it still required some amount of manual labour. Engines started lifting water with great force, wells went deeper and deeper and ground water became even scantier. This is happening even today.

The water to be given to the crops in the field was made to flow artificially using channels specially created for this purpose. The quantum of the flow of water depended on the duration of the water extraction. Leafy vegetables like tandulja (amaranthus) and ghol (purslane leaves) would grow on their own on the excess water.

Ghagari and/or kalsha (mud vessels) were used to carry water. This underwent a series of changes with vessels being made of various metals such as copper, iron, brass, zinc, German silver and finally plastic. Round vessels with a narrow mouth have been popular historically. It was a tricky and tiring thing to draw water from the wells with a rope tied to the vessel. The vessel would invariably scrape against the walls and get worn out quickly. Only skilful and fit men could manage to bring out the vessel without touching the walls. The solution to this was using a rahaat (wheel and pulley). The lifespan of the vessels would increase due to the rahaat. Men used to carry the vessels on the shoulder and women on the hips. Most wells did not have steps. The intention was probably to discourage people from entering and soiling the water. If the vessel fell into the well, it was picked up with a hook. The hook owner was rewarded with coconuts or money. Some brave people would jump into the well and take out the vessel. A kind soul would leave a rope and a vessel by the wells in the forest for passersby.

While farming, the landowner’s servants used to take the animals to graze early in the morning. During the course of the day, they would be served breakfast and lunch. Water was carried in a big vessel and served in small mugs. These mugs are called tambya (originating from the word ‘tambe’ which means copper in Marathi). Later, even after mugs were made out of other metals, the name tambya survived.

If the water in the well became unsuitable for drinking, a pillar was built near the well and a bone was tied to it. This served as a signal to the passers-by that the water was not potable. A famous verse says:

Young ladies avoid
Men with hair too white
Their water is spoilt
Like a well with a bone tied.

Fuel and fire

Humans were omnivorous in the Stone Age. They ate raw food. When the use of fire was discovered, they realized that food can be delicious. When one mentions fire, we imagine flames. But there are many forms of fire. A controlled fire is used for cooking. The mid-sixth century ce marks the invention of matchsticks in China. Matchboxes arrived in India around the First World War. Another thirty to forty years must have passed for them to reach rural areas. Most households could not afford matchboxes. Many people used to ‘fetch’ fire from their neighbour’s kitchen (neighbours had to be of the same caste, of course). There was a proverb about this, in fact—she is such a miser that she won’t even share the fire from her hearth.

To keep the kitchen fire alive at all times, they would burn a piece of dried cow-dung in the ashes. One had to make sure to bring the fire indoors during the rainy season. It was believed that the god of rain cursed you if you ‘burnt’ raindrops by letting them fall on fire. A diya (oil lamp) or a lantern was lit from one of the nearby houses. The lamp was then covered by the pallu or padar, the loose end of the sari, to protect it from the breeze. Those who have encountered this glowing ghostly figure in pitch darkness would be haunted by it forever. Before the arrival of the matchbox in India, people used cotton or rags to kindle fire. Pebbles or pieces of metal were used to strike a spark which kindled the cotton cloth, which was then fed with dry grass, twigs and wood.

The ash was removed from the kitchen fire every morning using a spatula, carefully avoiding the live fire.

The ash was used for brushing teeth, washing utensils, cleaning hands, washing hands after defecation and also for mixing in paint for painting walls. Coal or smooth ash was used to brush the teeth. Once in a while, the hearth would be cleaned, clearing all the ashes, and then it would be white-washed. When the wood got wet in the rainy season it used to get very smoky.

Another way to carry fire was with matchstick-like but longer wooden sticks. It was quite a task to make these sticks, which would burn slowly and steadily. Plants such as ambadi (roselle), kewda (umbrella tree) and ghaaipaat (agave) were used for this. Parts of these shrubs were soaked in water for many days, sticks formed and dried. Afterwards the sticks would become ready for use. One such stick could fire many people's hearths. Hence it was used as a metaphor for a promiscuous lady, with the saying, 'a single slender wire can start many a fire'.

Chool: The kitchen hearth

The chool is a means to control and regulate fire and bond it with everyday life, and receive in return cooked food, light and warmth. Is this then any different from the yagna? Both are fireplaces where humans offer something with an expectation to receive something better in return, in a tangible or intangible way respectively. Man must have mastered the art of controlling fire first and then to keep it alive. It is hard to restrain fire if it goes out of control.

Temporary chools were made by laying three stones in an open space. But they had to be constantly protected from wind and rains. With houses came stability. The kitchen fireplace was built inside the four walls and got protection from the natural elements. But this was risky and if something went wrong, the whole house would catch fire. So keen attention was paid to build safe and solid fireplaces. Soon the indoor versions became popular and temporary three-stone chools remained only to be used in the backyard for boiling water or on special occasions and pilgrimages.

Permanent chools were built with proper planning. Housewives would estimate the number of people to be fed—family and guests, the size of utensils that would be used and then copied the building techniques by observing the good ones around. They also made sure that the pans and pots would be heated evenly from all sides and there was enough space for the cook to sit comfortably on one side. Care was taken to ensure that the handling of utensils, processes like baking, roasting, frying and stirring would be easy and comfortable. A separate space was set aside nearby to store firewood. There used to be a hook to hang the lamp used in the night. Vili, a chopping device made of a wooden board with a multi-purpose curved knife hinged at one end, would be kept handy but out of children's reach.

A blowpipe was also an essential item to get a fire alight. It was made out of bamboo. It would catch fire easily and also get spoiled if it came in contact with water. People started using iron pipes when they became cheaper and easily available, usually half to one inch in diameter. This blowpipe would be kept in a standing position in a fixed place. In addition to its designated use, the pipe—hopefully only the bamboo one—was also used as a weapon to smack naughty children and thieving dogs.

Mud chools made by potters were uniform. But they were not affordable for everyone. So, people made their own chools in many shapes and sizes. Even if they bought the potter's chool, it would be kept movable or permanently fixed as per their own convenience. In later times, iron chools and burners were available, but did not become popular. These slow burners stuffed with chopped straw were used only on special occasions for something that needed slow cooking. Mostly, people would fix a big vessel on such burners for heating up water for bathing. The bumb, a boiler specifically designed to heat water, was a luxury. The point is that chools brought fire under human control.

Fuel

Fire became vital to process food and make it edible and palatable. To produce fire, mainly wood and cattle dung were used as fuel in daily domestic life. People who owned cows, bullocks or buffaloes got their daily share of dung easily. Others had to roam around following cattle to obtain the same. Fresh dung would be flattened either on stone walls on the floor manually, in palm-sized cakes, and allowed to dry. They had to be

turned from time to time so that they would dry out completely. Other inferior inflammable substances like corn straw, wheat stalk, chaff, sawdust and various legume husks were collected and mixed in the dung.

All the surplus dung-cakes would be stored carefully as a reserve for the rainy season. In summer the people roamed the forest and collected dung. The cattle dung contained white larvae and black dung-worms (larvae of the dung beetle). These dried dung-cakes were used to give warmth to women after childbirth. This was done by placing burning dung-cakes under the rope-cots on which the women sat. They would also add dill in this fire. This smoke had a distinct smell.

The ash of cow-dung was used in painting walls and cleaning the chool. A soiled cloth known as 'potara' was used for this. Potara or potera is the last stage of any garment. So the phrase, 'someone's life has become a mere potera' has come into being.

Buffalo dung was not used to clean the house. Many buffaloes (and a few cows) had a habit of '*irvad karane*' which literally means to deviate from a regular practice but here refers to eating human faeces. Their dung was smelly and it was very difficult for women to make dried cakes out of such dirty dung.

To use proper wood was a luxury for these two communities. Mang and Mahar men would break wood for others till their hands were blistered. And after such hard work, all they would get in return was bhakri (jowar or bajra flatbread) and buttermilk. In summers, the women used to collect wood by breaking down worn-out fences. For that they had to beg the farm owner for hours. The fence was mainly made of acacia and occasionally jamun (Malabar plum) branches. The job of making new fences using fresh plum and acacia branches was done by the men from these communities itself. But still the owners would try to save their old fences.

Sugarcane waste after harvest was brought to heat water. Women would also bring leftovers of other crops to be used as fuel. The dry shrubs left after harvesting pigeon peas were thorny and would cause a deep wound if handled carelessly. Women would look for any agricultural waste or solid wood on public land or nearby forests that could potentially be used as fuel.

Upper castes and those who looked up to them and imitated them did not use the wood of certain sacred trees like cotton, pipal, banyan, bael and shami as fuel. But there was no such restriction on Mahars and Mangs, so they would use their wood if and when such trees fell naturally due to age or a storm.

Utensils

According to archaeological research, human tribes around the world gradually gained stability and started living in houses and colonies. Lifestyle, food habits, weapons and equipment required for a settled life evolved alongside. Stone axes, bone needles, cutting tools and others must have been the early signs of human ingenuity and experimentation in the Stone Age.

The art of making pots and vessels by smearing mud on baskets made of bamboo or other flexible vines and tree twigs must have developed over time. At some point inadvertently or accidentally, such utensils may have come in contact with fire and become waterproof and sturdy. Or some mud might have been burnt and hardened underneath a fire or by a lightning strike and that must have given people the idea of making pots out of clay. From that point, the business of pottery must have developed. In a sidelight, according to Indian mythology, wives of sages used to make clay vessels and carry water daily in them on the strength of their pure and pious love towards their husbands—or so they say!

Clay vessels have been in use right from the Stone Age through the Iron Age, Copper Age, Bronze Age to even today. Their style, shape, size and craftsmanship may vary depending on country and region but pottery has been around ever since the inception of settled human life. Clay utensils and their relics shed light on the history of the culture of different periods. Baked clay cannot be recycled, so artefacts of the material have survived in one form or another.

Plates and bowls made of tree leaves are also still in use. At some point, people must have realized that leaves when shaped into a bowl can easily hold liquids. But it's difficult to trace their origins as they perish, unlike clay pots. Perhaps our ancestors used the leaves of the same trees that we currently do.

The discovery, development and use of pottery is a common link in most cultures of the world. Modern inventions such as metals and alloys were first used mainly by the leaders and elite in the society. These habits slowly percolated down the hierarchy according to the caste structure.

Maharashtra has a long history of using utensils made from gold, silver, bronze (imported from Iran and Mesopotamia, i.e., Iraq), copper (known for about 9,000 to 10,0000 years), brass (made by the Romans by mixing copper and zinc), and so on. These two communities must have barely used one or two such metal utensils—barring, of course, gold and silver that were out of reach. They relied mainly on earthenware and at most ironware until aluminium, the once-rare and expensive metal, became cheap and easily available in India. In the late nineteenth century, when aluminium arrived in India, it was known by various names like jarman, jaraman, enamel and jarmal. It marked the end of earthenware and brought an era of durable and affordable metal utensils in poor people's homes.

The clay tava (frying or roasting flat pan) was replaced by the iron one. Large vessels made of copper, brass, iron, etc., were used only on special occasions to cook large quantities of food. In daily use, different sizes of pots were used which had unique names according to their shape and size. Brass vessels need regular maintenance in the form of 'kalhai' (tinning) of their interiors. Otherwise, the food turns black and sometimes also poisonous. It was not affordable for commoners to get this upkeeping done regularly, so they used such utensils very rarely.

Depending on the financial status of the household, there was a wide variety of utensils in the kitchen—deep flat-bottomed pans, other cooking pots and kadhais (woks), plates, spoons, cooking spoons to stir, fry and roast food, beaters, blowpipes, knives, bowls and cups of different sizes and shapes—each meant for a specific use, lids for big vessels, a rolling pin for making chapatis or puran poli, pol-pat or a flat board for rolling chapatis; the list is endless. The pol-pat, musal, jaate and ravi were not commonly available in Dalit homes but some or most of the other utensils were.

There were specific spatulas to turn and toss the chapati or bhakri on a hot tava, called ulathana. Children who didn't come home on time often had to hear this angry line from their mothers: 'Where the hell did you go to turn and toss? You so-and-so ulathayla.'

Vili, an iron knife hinged to a long wooden slab, was commonly used. Women would sit at one end of this slab and unfold the blade, which was otherwise kept in a folded position, with its edge downwards over the slab, outwards on its hinge, to cut vegetables and fruits. They used the specialized round blade on the tip of the knife to grate coconut, whenever needed.

The pakkad or tongs arrived quite late in the poorer kitchens. Women used their padar (pallu, or flowing loose end of the sari) to hold and lift hot utensils.

Ukhal—a large and heavy mortar carved out of a monolithic stone and used for grinding, would be usually placed in a corner near the kitchen. A stone or iron pestle was used to pound things in this. A small piece of cloth was always kept in the ukhal. It was used to save it from dust and also used to clean it. Very few among the Mahar and Mang communities had an ukhal at home due to its weight and high cost. Other grinding equipment such as paata–warwanta—a flat grinding stone along with a smaller hand-held grinding stone, or a smaller mortar and pestle, were also not affordable.

The jaate was a simple stonehand mill to grind grain into flour. It was of two types, fixed and movable: the bottom stones of the bigger jaate were fixed in the ground, while smaller jaates were movable and, during use, placed on a thick cloth for stability. It is said that the discovery of jaate took place in Takshashila. Takhta or taksha means grinder and shila means stone.

The jaate was made of two circular grinding stones, one on top of the other. A wooden or iron axle was fixed into the centre of the lower stone, and came halfway up the upper stone, leaving a round cavity in the centre. The upper stone rotated over the lower one, driven by a simple detachable handle that was made of a short section of a wooden rod and fixed on top near the edge of the upper stone. Both these—the axle and the handle—were called khuta. Some of the larger jaates were equipped with two such handles so two persons could turn the mill.

Grain was poured into the central cavity while turning the grindstone, and flour poured out from between the two stones. The surroundings of the ukhal and jaate had to be kept extra clean so that no dirt or debris

could get in the flour.

If either khuta became loose, an old cloth was used to tighten the fit. A stone was kept by to hammer the khutas and fix them in place. Big jaates' lower stones were fixed in the ground. The small movable jaates were placed on a thick cloth for stability. When both the grinding surfaces of jaate wore smooth over time, they ceased to grind the flour fine enough. Women from the Paatharvat (stone-worker) community would come to the house to make the surfaces rough again. They dealt in barter and accepted old clothes or foodgrains in exchange.

Jaates were made of various stones. Those made out of kurund stone did not last long. Pieces of such defunct jaates were used as sharpeners for kitchen knives, vili and sickles.

Many households could not afford to have a jaate. It was common for women to go to their neighbours' homes to grind grain. If someone made a fuss about it, others would upbraid them, saying, 'We are only grinding our own grain, not taking away your khutas.' Such exchanges were common among women.

There was a particular way in which women would sit at the jaate for grinding. They would wipe it with a dry cloth. Then the left leg was folded close to the body and the right leg was stretched out next to the jaate. They would rotate the jaate with the right hand and drop the grains in it with their left hand. Sometimes two women would work the same jaate.

Some kitchen utensils, like the musal (used for grinding chillies) and ravi (buttermilk churner), were never found in the kitchens of the Mang and Mahar castes.

The soop (used for winnowing grain) was bought from the Burud community that specialized in weaving cane products. It was soaked in water and then a puja performed for it. Then it was smeared with fresh cow-dung and left to dry. The soop had to be treated with dung every eight to fifteen days. Women from the villages would also buy other cane products such as containers to store grains, coops to keep hens and chicks, and baskets for other small utensils. There were separate sieves to sift flour, chilli powder, semolina, and so on.

The women used to lend flour, grains and oil to each other in times of need. There were separate jugs to store oil. There were bigger and sharper knives to kill animals and dismember them. Different kinds of knives were used to cut different body parts, such as choppers for bones and the like.

Although the main work of the Mang caste was to make ropes, they also did other work such as making woven-rope cots, and small cane containers and brooms. Brooms were made from the leaves of the shindi trees (wild date palm). Not everyone from the community was able to make brooms. It is a laborious task to climb the palm and cut down the stiff, thorny leaves, cut the thorns, split the leaves, dry them in the sun, make a thin but tough rope to tie the broom and then finally tie the broom. Sometimes they would also paint the handle of the broom before selling it. Brooms thus brought from the Mangs were not immediately used. Village people considered the broom to be Laxmi—the goddess of wealth. They would sprinkle water on it, offer haldi-kunku, perform a puja and then start using it. The broom was never kept in an upright position. Everyone was careful not to kick the broom even by mistake. If they accidentally did, they would pretend to spit or ask for forgiveness by doing an action similar to touching someone's feet. On the Laxmipujan day during Diwali, they worshipped the broom.

The Mahars and Mangs used large vessels to draw and heat water for baths. There were no built toilets at all. People would carry water in small jugs when going to defecate. Not everyone carried water to wash themselves. Some used leaves or water from a nearby water source such as a pond, stream or river. Every village had assigned places for people to defecate—separate for men and women. Children were made to defecate near the house. In most villages, pigs were kept in two or three houses. So, pigs and to some extent dogs, and sometimes even a few cows and buffaloes, would clean up these areas by eating human faeces.

Measurements

In every household of every caste, some people, usually the eldest sons and daughters, had the responsibility of managing all the religious rituals of their respective family deity. The same deity could be worshipped by

many communities. There was no social restriction on who could worship which god, although entry into temples was restricted.

On certain days dedicated to the deity, such as Monday, Tuesday, Friday or Sunday, on all full-moon days and during Navratri, these ‘responsible’ folk had to ask for foodgrains or cooked food in the name of God from at least five other houses. People were expected to give at least a fistful of flour or grain. If the household was of the same caste as the one asking, then even cooked food was offered and accepted.

If the households were mourning someone’s death or celebrating someone’s birth, they were exempt from giving food. If the house had no one but a lone menstruating woman, she was also exempt from offering food. They would indicate this situation by saying a particular word, ‘waagava’, and the person asking for food would move on. Often, if the family had nothing to give, they would also excuse themselves by saying the same word. If two devotees run into each other while asking for food, instead of sharing the collected food received by each other, they would exchange some words praising the Lord and move on.

Due to scarcity of cash, the barter system was the convention. The payment for the work of digging, plucking, picking and cutting of the harvest was done by giving a part of the harvest itself. Whether the share was one-fourth, one-third or half depended on various factors such as the existing norms, effort involved and so on. Groundnut was harvested twice a year. Labourers would grasp the groundnut leaves, uproot the vine and collect the pods. Labourers were allowed to eat as many peanuts as they wanted while plucking. Their wages were calculated according to sacks or small baskets full of peanuts. Some farmers were generous while some were forever whining. Workers would judge the character of the landowners by observing whether they heaped up the peanuts in the baskets just level with the brim. The generous ones would level the basket, so the count of harvested baskets was higher and the worker was paid more.

For other crops such as mung, urad, bajra and kharif jowar, they used to get the sheaves or bundles of grain measured in ‘dhoti’ as wages. In Marathi, one dhoti means the space between the two arms stretched straight out in front of the body, with both arms and palms parallel to each other at a shoulder distance. Workers were happy if the farmer was a strong and hefty man with broad shoulders. The wages for harvest of rabi jowar was in the form of pachunda. Pachunda is a unit that equals five sheaves (tied bundles) of harvested plants. For balutedars, too, the remuneration was in the form of a predetermined number of pachundas.

Milk was measured in different-sized cups. Sometimes the milking would be done in front of the customers. The milk-sellers used a smart way of adulterating the milk with water in such situations. They would take some water in the milking bucket to wash the cow’s udders but not use it all, and left it in the bucket, which went unnoticed.

Before the metric system, every region had its own units of measurements (the approximate metric equivalents are given after each): the basis for measurement was gunj (Indian liquorice, also known as crab’s eye), the seed of a vine of the same name, which weighed approximately 1/10th of 1 gm. Multiples of a gunj made up the weights: masa (1 gm), tola (10 gm), chhataak (20 gm), aadpav (70 gm), ardhapav (125 gm), pav (250 gm), sher (approx. 2 kg), rattal (approx. 1.25 kg). There were a few more measures: chilawa (50 ml), nelawa (75–100 ml), mapat (150–200 gm), chipat (250 gm), atawa (1 kg), sher (2 kg), adali (approx. 2.5–3 kg), paayali (7 kg) and so on—the larger ones to weigh grain. Measurements vary from region to region.

Men and women of the Mahar and Mang castes used to calculate money in multiples of twenty (vees or ees) like one twenty, two twenties, etc. The unit ‘khandi’ (1 khandi = twenty animals) was used to count animals and the unit ‘munn’ (1 munn = 40 kg) for larger amounts of weight. Land was measured in units of 40 acres—which was called ‘*ek number jameen* [one number land]’; so, 80 acres was ‘two number land’ and so on.

Mango-pickers were paid in mangoes. They used to pick mangoes with a hook and collect them in baskets. The assistant holding the baskets was also given a share of the produce.

The women and children used to glean the leftover pods that were left behind in the groundnut fields after harvest and sell them to the shopkeepers. The money earned from this was referred to as ‘khulvar’.

Bhakri (flatbread)

Bhakri is central to an everyday meal. It is mainly made of jowar or bajra. Bhakri made out of yellow jowar was also eaten. This is the crop grown during kharif or monsoon season. Children used to hate yellow-jowar bhakri because it was bitter. A tagari or katvat—a large, deep plate like a round tray—was used to knead the dough and also to flatten and roll out the bread. These plates were usually made of wood from trees such as neem, mango, jamun, rosewood and babool. But the Mahars and Mangs could not afford rosewood, so neem or other cheaper wood was used in their homes. Bhakris made in neem plates had a bitter taste. These wooden plates would warp and crack from their constant contact with water. The plate had two small handles to hold it firmly in place when using it for kneading or flattening out a bhakri.

Over time, the wooden plates became outdated and iron and brass ones became popular. A saying related to these metal plates was common in rural areas: 'If your mind is clear and straight, you'll see Ganges in your plate.' Just as you can see your reflection in a clean, polished, unbent plate, so will it be if you possess a pure, pious, straightforward mind: the blessings of holy Ganga water will come to you automatically. Usually, after the men finished their meal, the women, especially the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law, would eat together from the same plate.

When grains were first used as food; they would be crushed between two stones or sometimes roasted, soaked and ground. Bhakri, chapati and bread would have been later inventions. Bhakris must have been made by hand before the making of plates on which to flatten them. Until as recently as 1980, older women used to make bhakri by flattening it with their hands. Equipment like the pol-pat and belan (rolling board and rolling pin) was not available in every house (and would not be much use for bhakri as the dough is very friable) and these devices were used only in the festive season for making puran poli and chapati, which are made from wheat flour. Women would borrow the pol-pat from others. If they couldn't get hold of any, they would use the back of a plate as a rolling board and a blowpipe would substitute for a rolling pin.

The use of milk, curd and ghee was rare in these communities. Even if someone from these castes kept a cow or a buffalo, they did not have their own land, space or fodder to graze them. So that would lead to quarrels over land use. So, in general, they had to rely on upper castes for all milk products.

Getting hold of buttermilk, the cheapest of the lot, was also not that easy. In order to get buttermilk from rich households, they had to do some chores in return. Few of this community could keep a cow or buffalo as they lacked the means. Women would go and ask for buttermilk for their young children—hopefully without having to do anything in return. There was no surety that it would be given. Sometimes they would not ask for it straight out as they felt ashamed, and would start with roundabout small talk as a way to work towards the request for free buttermilk. Hence the saying, 'Don't try to hide, don't try to bilk, when you all you want is the buttermilk.'

Sometimes upper-caste people would themselves invite the people from these communities to take away the excess buttermilk. If it was sour, it was given even more generously. When they got a large quantity of buttermilk, Dalit women would make many dishes such as ambil (buttermilk cooked with water and flour), kadhi (chickpea flour and buttermilk curry), taak–kanya (small dumplings in buttermilk) for the next two or three days. There were sayings made based on the tradition of accepting buttermilk, which reflect the pragmatism and sense of humour of the Dalit community: 'I'm not hungry, I'm good … Is there some buttermilk and some food?' or 'Says "I'm rich, I'm cool"—and scrapes the dustbin like a fool.'

They refer to those who pretend to be superior and refuse an offer initially but later come back when the best is over and then accept the leftovers.

An old clay jar was used to store salt. This would be covered with a cloth or a plate. Flours, grains, pulses and other things were stored in clay or metal bins of various sizes. These jars would be arranged in the form of a pyramid, with the largest at the bottom. Most of the time, they used to put dried 'hingan' (a kind of fruit) in the flour to ward off the evil eye. This fruit with natural cleansing properties surely warded off insects if not the evil eye. Some people would put neem leaves in the grain. This was also an effective pest and insect repellent.

Cooking tips (or tricks)

From time immemorial, the culture around food has evolved and established itself in every part of the world based on the country, state, district, village, locality, religion, caste, environment, climate, social condition, geographical location and composition, culture and availability. In Maharashtra, geographical conditions do play a role. But the culture of these two castes is artificially bound by man-made religions and the caste system and that, too, defines their unique food culture. Food rejected by religion was acceptable for these two castes. Like every other community, these people also defined and developed their own food habits on the basis of availability, affordability and allowability.

Cooking is a time-consuming process, be it vegetarian or non-vegetarian. In Maharashtra, control of the kitchen has primarily remained with women, irrespective of caste and religion. It is the women who developed our food and taste habits. Meat takes longer to cook than vegetables. The time required depends on various factors—what kind of animal it is, which body parts are being cooked, what kind of utensils are available, what kind of fuel is needed or at hand and so on. It has to be calculated in detail, incorporating all the known tricks of cooking meat. That is not enough, though. Along with the tricks, like any other style, non-vegetarian cooking entails a great deal of attention to detail, and warmth and affection.

These castes were involved in manual labour and women had to work outside of their homes as hard as men. In addition, women were also responsible for cooking, fuel, water and children. They would always think about how the food could be made edible, in a sufficient quantity, and in a minimum amount of time just before everyone's hunger spiked.

The calculations for the proportions and quantities of ingredients and items were etched in their heads due to long experience. Equations of mouths to be fed and the quantities to be prepared needed no calculation. There were no fixed guidelines as to how many bowls of a particular thing to take, how many tablespoons of this and how many teaspoons of that. They never bothered about exactly how much salt and chilli powder to add—a spoonful or a bowlful. While narrating recipes of these vegetarian dishes, experience took centre stage rather than the precise proportions of ingredients. Even though all the ingredients are the same, the taste changes the moment you tweak the proportion of one or more.

In these castes, the food that is being made or evolved has emerged out of necessity and not out of passion and experimentation. Every woman made food in her own way and each dish had its own distinct flavour. This applies to women of other castes as well. So, no one ever said, 'This is exactly how my mother would make it.' (An expression used in advertisements of branded masalas in the Indian market, which have homogenized the country's cuisines.)

The main reason for the lack of development of a larger number of recipes and delicacies by women of these two castes is their independent status and a hard-working lifestyle. As it was a working class, there were no restrictions on the women to stay indoors. Rather, they had to work hard to make ends meet. They did not have a religious obligation to perform rituals like Chaturmas—the four months of abstinence and fasting. On the contrary, it was the class that depended on the labour and productivity of this working class that used to observe Chaturmas and other religious rituals. Neither the men nor the women of this lazy, privileged class ever had to perform any outdoor physical labour. Their women had plenty of leisure time. Therefore, arts such as painting, handicrafts, culinary art, classical singing and playing instruments were lapped up and advanced by this class. They had the necessary tools and time to experiment. They also had religious protection and social approval, which was most crucial.

4

What does ‘non-vegetarian’ mean for us?

Exploring the diverse food culture of these two castes, Mahar and Mang, while using a regional lens warrants its own independent research. Even in Maharashtra, there are two broad regions, namely Konkan and Ghat. Instead of getting into such divisions, this book reviews the caste-based and regional food cultures mentioned in Marathi Dalit literature. The reason for selecting Dalit autobiographies is simple. These are honest experiences by writers who have lived those lives and had that food. There is (and should be) no room for fictionalization or imagination. It is reliable. Moreover, Dalit literature (whether one really likes it or not) has been read by most Marathi readers. This can be confidently stated because the popular humourist and writer, the iconic P.L. Deshpande, had praised Dalit autobiographies wholeheartedly. Going by the patterns of his followers, mostly comprising Marathi middle-class readers, they must have read or at least skimmed this literature out of curiosity.

Baluta (Daya Pawar), *Taral-Antaral* (Shankarrao Kharat), *Athavaninche Pakshi* (P.I. Sonkamble), *Katyavarchi Pota* (Uttam Bandu Tupe) and *Akkarmashi* (Sharankumar Limbale): these are the representative Dalit autobiographies from which we have selected the names and references of the food mentioned. Listed below are colloquial names for different body parts of different animals. These are not mere words, but every word encompasses an organ, its taste and its recipe. Some parts change their taste and colour when mixed with other ingredients. When cooked together, they produce a different recipe and a different taste. The following is a description of the parts of various animals or types of meat and how they are cooked. The names have been taken from the representative books mentioned above as well as from the memory of the writer. The interpretation is according to the writer’s recollection. An altered form of these words may be used in different regions but usually the base form remains unchanged.

Pad

In a strict literal sense, it means ‘fall’ or ‘fallen’. The corpse of an animal that died naturally was called ‘pad’. Those who did not eat pad referred to it as ‘mati’ (clay, corpse, waste) while those who did, called it ‘bhaji’ (curried dish, edible thing). The term covered all animals associated with agriculture. It was an important source of meat for these two castes.

Animals that were considered sacred when alive, became impure once they died. Only these two castes—Mahar and Mang—could perform the processes for animal disposal. To keep the rest of the village pure, a piece of barren land called hadki-hadawala was reserved near the village just for the use of these castes for this activity.

If any animal died in the farmer’s field or barn, a message was sent across to the disposal experts. If the animal was very heavy, it was carried in a bullock cart, otherwise four people tied its feet to a strong rod and carried it to the hadki-hadawala. Many animals used to fall sick during the monsoon.

The skin of the pad usually belonged to the animal owner. Care was taken to ensure that the knife did not pierce the skin when flaying the carcass: damaged skin had no market value. It was essential to apply salt immediately on the skin, otherwise it started rotting and became useless. It was next sent to the Chambhar (cobbler) or Dhor household for further processing and sale.

The edibility of the meat depended on the time since the death of the animal. Sending a message immediately after an animal died was crucial.

Helya

Helya, halya, halgat, mahish, reda, redi, redku, vagar, vishwamitri are various names by which the buffalo is known. The meat of this animal is called helya. Buffaloes have existed in southern India and southern Asia since pre-Vedic times. Approximately 4,000 years ago, humans started taming this animal. In Marathi saints' literature, the buffalo is called 'vishwamitri'. In Sanskrit it is called 'mahas' and the cow is called 'maha'.

Halal

The term halal came to India with Islam. Castes like Kalal (Hindus) were engaged in slaughtering animals in the pre-Islamic era. Even today, there are Hindu butchers in Maharashtra. They are known as khatik. But meat from Muslim butchers is favoured even by Hindus. After the arrival of Muslims in the south, many Hindu khatiks must have handed over their butchering work to them: a new kind of caste, Mulani, came into being—it comprised Muslim butchers. In some places it has been included in balutedars. There was at least one Mulani household in every village. They would recite Faati (verses) from the Holy Quran before killing animals.

In halal, the animal's neck is severed in a slow and painful way, unlike the method in which it is severed in a single stroke (jhatka). Halal meat has low blood content, whereas the meat looks bright red when the animal's neck is severed in a single stroke. The flesh of naturally dead animals also looked red.

There is also a difference in the nomenclature of butchers, depending on which animal they kill. Those who kill goats and sheep are called khatik and those who kill cows, bulls and buffaloes are known as kasai or kasab. In villages with no Mulani, there were others who learnt the halal technique of killing animals.

In the following sections we will look at the terms and nomenclature used for various types of meat and non-vegetarian food. Also interspersed are the recipes and ingredients needed to make those recipes and various anecdotes linked to these meats and various body parts.

Ragati/rakti (blood)

It is customary to let the animal drink water before slaughtering it. The animal's legs are tied and water is poured into its mouth. With water intake, the knife moves swiftly; else the blood will coagulate quickly. This may be the main reason behind offering water. The blood gushes out of the main blood vessel in its neck. This is collected in a large pan or pot. The same method is used for large animals as well as goat and sheep. The collected blood clots in some time, turning black from its original red colour.

Recipe

Ingredients

1. Blood
2. Salt to taste

Method

1. Pour the blood into a heavy-bottomed pot and put on the stove for boiling.
2. Add very little salt as the blood is already salty.
3. When the colour becomes a dark chocolate brown, it is ready. Cooked blood is very thick—thicker than tofu and paneer. Hot rakti tastes delicious when eaten immediately after cooking.

Lakuti/lakushi

It is a dish prepared from blood. When the cooked blood cools down, these thick chunks are broken and mashed gently by hand.

Ingredients

1. Oil or animal fat
2. Onions, chopped (finely or roughly per taste)
3. Yesur powder
4. Green chilli paste or crushed green chillies or red chilli powder
5. Mashed cooked blood
6. Green coriander leaves, chopped (optional)

Method

1. Place a heavy-bottomed pan or a tava on the fire.
2. Add fat or edible oil.
3. Add chopped onions and fry till brown.
4. Add yesur and mix well. Do not let it darken or burn.
5. Add chillies and mix thoroughly.
6. Immediately after that, before the masala turns dark, add the mashed blood and sauté.
7. Cook for five minutes, garnish with green coriander and serve.

Lakuti can be eaten by itself or along with bhakri or chapati. Food-lovers of all age groups love this dish. Its specialty is that it keeps for longer, because it does not contain water. Adding coriander leaves enhances its taste.

The main disadvantage of lakuti is that it causes temporary constipation, which lasts for a couple of days. Many abusive phrases were prevalent among women using the word rakti and they were mainly addressed to men such as ‘bathes in mud and eats in blood’ or ‘rakti-chatya’ meaning blood-licker.

Jeebh (tongue)

The tongue is much longer than it appears from outside. It is thick and rough. Its unexposed side is covered with a substance like the baby thorns of a babool tree. Since the tongue is rough, uneven and a little sticky, cutting and cleaning it is a task requiring skill. The recipe and preparation followed to cook tongue, whether in gravy or in the dry form is generally similar to mutton. Various recipes of mutton will follow, you can choose any to cook jeebh. Tongue takes twice as long to cook as normal meat.

The tongues of large ruminants are much bigger than one would think; that makes the tongue of large ruminants a valued meat unlike the much smaller one of other smaller animals. According to food connoisseurs, tongue tastes like the meat of a deer’s thigh, which is a bit rough and heavy. Women liked to make tongue curry gravy a bit thicker instead of watery. The price of tongue used to be lower than that of normal meat. Even jabda or mundi (head or skull) needs to be cooked in a similar way.

Recipe

1. Follow the recipes for regular meat.
2. Increase cooking time to twice that of mutton.
3. Make a thick gravy.

Fashi (epiglottis)

The fashi begins where the tongue ends. It is also called tilli or tilvan. Epiglottis is the anatomical term for it. It is a thin, dark and elongated piece of flesh, with a purple or bluish tinge and is a few centimetres thick. It

has a coating that looks like a plastic glazing and looks like a thin chocolate cake. The surface flesh looks like jelly. Underneath is dark, chocolatey flesh. Although the method of making fashi is similar to that of mutton, fashi has to be cooked separately. It is delicate and cooks faster than normal meat because it releases its own juices while cooking.

Recipe

Ingredients for marinating

1. Fashi
2. Salt
3. Turmeric
4. Ginger-garlic paste (optional, but greatly improves taste)

Ingredients for cooking

1. Oil or animal fat (used when there is no oil to be had)
2. Onions, chopped (finely or roughly)
3. Red or green chillies, roughly chopped (optional, but an improvement)
4. Green coriander leaves, chopped

Method

1. Cut and wash fashi. Mix with marinade and let it rest for 10–30 minutes.
2. Heat fat in a pan.
3. Add onions and fry till a nice brown.
4. Add marinated fashi and cook a bit.
5. Fry chillies in a little oil and add. Or add chillies directly without frying.
6. Cook till done. Fashi is a delicate meat and cooks quickly, releasing a lot of liquid.
7. Taste for salt and chilli flavour. Add more if needed.
8. Add very little water to make a thick gravy or none to make a dry version. Expert cooks say excess water spoils the dish.
9. Throw in a small fistful of chopped coriander leaves, if available.

Fashi tastes delicious with bhakri. Fashi is delicate, and has no bones and no fat, so children relish it very much. In some regions, fashi cooked without chillies was given to lactating mothers to help produce more milk.

A side note: Tamasha is a popular art form of Maharashtra which has skits, plays, music, songs and dance. Villagers come and watch these shows during festivals, annual fairs or other occasions. Since the majority of tamasha performers belonged to this food culture, the pun on the word ‘fashi’ was popular in tamasha. Here is a popular story enacted in the tamasha.

The story: A minister produces a thief in front of the king. When he reads out the list of his crimes, the king declares, ‘Give fashi to this man [hang him] right away!’

The thief, extremely surprised, says in a happy voice, licking his lips in anticipation: ‘Wah! You are going to serve me fashi? In this royal place? Serve it, please. It’s my favourite!’

The funny thing was only the Mahars and Mangs in the audience could get this joke. Fashi, in Marathi, means to hang someone to death. The epiglottis is not consumed by the upper castes, hence the culinary meaning of the word is often not known to them.

Mendu/mindu/bheja (brain)

Greyish, whitish, yellowish or pinkish, brain looks and feels slimy. Water cannot be added while cooking it.

It’s tastier when it’s just pan fried. Usually, the brain of cows/buffaloes needs to be cooked longer than goat brains.

Recipe 1

Ingredients

1. Oil or animal fat
2. Chopped onions
3. Any available chutney, e.g., ground chillies, chilli-garlic chutney, etc.
4. Brain
5. Salt
6. Turmeric
7. Green coriander leaves, chopped

Method

1. Add oil or fat in a pan or tava.
2. Add chopped onion and fry till nicely browned.
3. Add chutney and stir.
4. Add brain and stir, immediately add salt and turmeric.
5. Sauté for two minutes. Add coriander leaves. Serve immediately.

Recipe 2

Ingredients for marinade

1. Brain
2. Turmeric
3. Salt
4. Ginger-garlic paste
5. Green coriander leaves, chopped

Ingredients for cooking

1. Oil
2. Onions, chopped
3. Chilli powder and/or other masalas available

Method

1. Mix the brain with the marinade. Let it rest for 10–30 minutes.
2. Heat oil or fat in a tava or pan.
3. Fry chopped onions in it till they turn brown.
4. Take the marinated brain and tip into the pan, and stir well.
5. When the brain looks cooked, add masalas and cook a little longer on a very low flame.
6. Turn off the heat, cover the pan and let the curry cook in its own steam for five minutes.
7. Serve immediately.

Brain is a delicacy to be had by itself. It tastes finest when served hot. The taste changes once it cools down. Since it spoils quickly, it is usually prepared for breakfast. It is best to eat it with chapati or bhakri. Brain tastes a bit like egg yolk or matki (moth bean).

Kalij/kaleji (liver)

Liver, often referred to as kalij or yakrut in Marathi, spoils faster than meat so it is to be relished while fresh. Fresh, uncooked liver is dark purple. It turns black after a while. The liver also has a thin white membrane covering it. While cleaning the liver or holding a cut piece of liver in hand, the hand gets stained with a purplish discharge like ripe jamun (Indian blackberry) juice.

Liver is prepared in two ways: with a thick gravy or dry. The taste and texture of liver is different from that of mutton. Since liver cooks faster than mutton, it is prepared separately. Liver, when cooked by itself, is cooked the same way as fashi and mendu.

If the entire liver had not already been sold, the butcher would give a piece of it along with regular mutton. It is then cooked as part of the usual mutton preparation. But no matter how many other pieces of mutton are there, a piece of liver can easily be distinguished and spotted in the preparation. When liver is cooked, it becomes thick like mushroom. This too is loved by children as there is no bone, muscle or fat in it. Liver curry tastes outstanding with jowar or bajri bhakri.

Recipe

1. Follow the recipes for fashi and mendu.
2. Cook with a thick gravy or dry; use less water.

Boka/gudada/gurda (kidneys)

The two kidneys are surrounded by a thick layer of fat. It is in shades of brown just like a cat's eyes. Kidneys appear as plump as the cheeks of a tomcat, and tomcats are known as boka in Marathi. Perhaps that's why it is called boka. It is sold per piece and not by weight. Procuring kidneys (boka) is very difficult due to high demand.

Kidneys are as perishable as fashi, mendu and kalij, so whoever gets to the butcher first, benefits. The recipe for boka is similar to that for fashi, mendu and kalij. If there is no exclusive customer, it is given along with the mutton. It tastes the same, whether cooked in its own curry, without spices or in regular mutton curry. It looks and tastes like mushroom. Kids love this too. Although it changes colour when cooked, it can be easily identified in mutton curry, just like liver.

Animals also have kidney stones. The butchers skilfully separate them when asked. Offering liver and kidneys to someone at a feast was considered a special gesture and was done only for near and dear ones. When people quarrelled, those who had been thus honoured would be reminded: 'You have forgotten everything, even the fact that I/we have treated you with liver and kidneys.' These delicacies were a favourite of everyone but very rarely available to the Mahar and Mang communities.

Recipe

Follow the recipes for fashi, kalij or mendu, or simply add to your mutton curry.

Dil (heart)

The heart is a reddish-purple like a mix of liver and kidney and is as big as a custard apple. It used to be given along with regular meat. While washing the meat and even in the meat curry, the pieces float. It's not liked much by food-lovers as its taste and texture are a bit unusual—like a sponge.

Recipe

1. Clean and wash well; cut into small pieces.
2. Cook with regular mutton in a curry.

Fofis/pofis/kopis (lungs)

Salmon-pink in colour, light in weight, lungs are divided into two parts. Not everyone likes lungs. This is just as unpopular as the heart. It used to be given along with wajadi (intestines) rather than regular meat. Lungs are also perishable. They float in water while washing—they retain this quality in thin curries. Although the lung is like a sponge, it does not absorb the gravy. It is cooked in a distinct way.

Recipe

Ingredients

1. Lungs
2. Salt

Method

1. Cut the lungs into long, thin pieces.
2. Hang them on a stand (made using regular utensils with some tricks) over the stove. Keep the flames low—glowing embers, like for a barbecue, would be best.
3. Rub a little salt over the pieces, if required, while roasting.
4. Roast till original colour changes and becomes darker and pieces look done. Serve.

The smoky aroma lingers in the atmosphere and makes everyone salivate. These moist pieces are delicious to eat. This is the only recipe of lungs that is popular amongst foodies.

Gana (trachea or windpipe)

Gana looks exactly like the white drainpipe of a washing machine or washbasin. It is crispy and makes a crunching noise when you bite it—karram, kurram—just like the sound in a famous advertisement for papad. The sensation is exactly what you experience when eating cucumber.

This is also cooked along with other meat in a curry. There is no separate recipe for this.

Recipe

Chop into small pieces and cook with meat in a curry in the usual way.

Tona (bones)

In simple Marathi, people call bones nalli or tube. These are the bones attached to the joints—chiefly the long bones of the limbs, which are filled with marrow. Shankar Rao Kharaat in his autobiography *Taral-Antaral* says that there are sixteen types of tona. Animals have joints in sixteen places and each has its own name, such as thoga, gudsa, dharya, chakalya, bhegu, metya and so on. Metya means the haunches on which the tired animal rests when it becomes feeble or is totally exhausted. A phrase in Marathi—*metakutila yene*—to sit on one's haunches (meaning a very exhausted state), may be a reference to this. Black magic is referred to as jadu-tona (magic with human bones). The bones in the magician's hands are those of the joints and must have led to the phrase being used.

Tona in cookery is nothing but different nallis chopped into pieces. The various broken tonas are given along with the main meat. Children would be given tona cooked without adding spices. They would eat tona holding it with both hands and with their eyes closed. This was to avoid the possibility of it slipping out of their hands or the curry squirting into their eyes. The best part of tona is vasu (bone marrow). Hot bhakri is mashed by hand and vasu mixed in it. This soft mixture is given to children. It must be served hot, because it dries out after cooling down. Sometimes vasu could not be drawn out of the tona easily; then the tona would

be held upright and be knocked hard on a flat stone or board. Vasu in spicy curry also tastes excellent with hot bhakri.

In the code language of the Mangs, ‘vas’ means absorb or suck up. It is usually very easy to suck marrow out of the small tonas. Maybe that’s why it’s called vasa. If the tona is small, the marrow is also called bal. In Sanskrit vasa means fat.

Bal and mand (fat)

Bal is the fat within the meat. The fattier the meat, the better its quality, according to the Mahar and Mang community. Otherwise, they would label the meat as inferior and thin.

This is the layer of fat that accumulates and floats atop cooked meat curry. When the cooked meat cools down, the fat congeals and forms a thick layer of white, sometimes yellowish or greenish, fat resembling the thick fresh cream that accumulates on milk.

Hot jowar bhakri would be crushed and some of this fat layer would be mixed in it. A novice would start coughing profusely if they tried eating this. Children loved the mixture made by adding non-spicy fat on hot bhakri.

This fat doesn’t taste good when eaten after cooling down. The gravy must be hot in order to enjoy this delicacy. By the time one was through eating, the remaining fat would stick to the plate. It used to get stuck in the gaps of teeth and under the nails. If it came in contact with cold water, it became even stickier and tough to remove. Hot water with ash or soap would be used to wash the hands and a rough cloth was used to wipe them so that the accumulated fat would come off from the nails. Some people could not digest this fat and it would lead to dysentery.

Mand is the deposit of pure fat found in various parts of the body. Some people call it toop (ghee or clarified butter). Animals have more fat around their diaphragm, intestines and kidneys. Healthy and young animals have fat deposits everywhere in the body. Fat from cows and buffaloes varies in colour. Fat near the diaphragm is like a large piece of cloth and it is silver or golden, just like the clothes worn during sacred and religious rituals by upper-caste people.

The meat is washed before cooking but fat cannot be washed. It is separated and hung out to dry draped on a line, like clothes. As it dries, it becomes stiff. This dried fat can be used as a substitute for oil for frying. When the pan is heated over fire, add as many pieces of fat as needed. Every fat chunk has some amount of flesh. Heat separates this meat from the fat. The onion and masalas can be fried in this fat. This was the traditional way of frying when oil was not easily available. This continues even today.

Mandyatala kaala (bhakri mashed in hot fat)

Children love this dish. This kaala (mixture) is eaten hot; otherwise, it sticks to the mouth.

Recipe

1. Place the required quantity of pieces of fat, dried or fresh, in a tava or heavy-bottomed pan and place on a low flame. Gradually the fat begins to melt and separate from the chunks.
2. When pieces of the remnant flesh (or solid fat) start floating on this released fat, add salt to taste.
3. Crush hot bhakri and mix in this kaala (mixture).

Chunchune

Chunchune is a by-product of melting the chunks of fat.

All the fat of large animals cannot be eaten at once. It was often used as an oil substitute for tempering. Kasab or kasai (butchers of larger animals) men and women used to make chunchune from this fat and sell it.

They used to put fat pieces in a large wok on a fire. The heat separated the oil from the chunks and the solid pieces floated on it, enabling them to be deep fried. These fried pieces are called chunchune. Perhaps they are

called so because when the oil starts to separate from the pieces, the sound made by the release of fine bubbles resembles ‘chun-chun’. Kasab women used to sell this as if they were selling roasted peanuts, neatly arranged in baskets. Some of them would shout, ‘Chunchune … chunchune!’ They indeed looked like roasted pods of peanuts. Some people would eat them as a pastime, some as a meal accompaniment and some as an accompaniment for alcohol.

The rendered fat that separates when making chunchune smells like vegetable oil. It was filled into containers while it was hot. There is no clarity or evidence of what was done with it after that. If it was sold in big cities to make soaps or for something else, one would not know.

Fardul

Fardul is the name for gristle—the whitish-yellow rubber-like flattened tissues found in meat, mainly on the abdomen. It does not cook easily. A cooked piece does not tear easily, either. It tastes delicious but eating it is a tedious task. Usually, one needs to hold it with one’s front teeth and pull with both hands while keeping the eyes closed. If the other end of the fardul slips out of one’s hand, it shoots backwards and droplets of curry will definitely enter the eyes. The mechanism is similar to the pulling action of a catapult. Some veteran foodies may just swallow the entire chunk.

Dalli

Dali, dallya or dalli is same as botkya, small pieces of meat (sheep or goat). But it is more commonly used for pieces of superior-quality meat. In Urdu and Hindi, the phrase ‘mishri ki dali’ means a piece of high-quality sugar. There was a famous phrase, ‘If it rises, it’s bulli (penis), else gosh ki dalli (a tiny chunk of meat).’ If a young man begins wearing fashionable clothes and acting hip and ogling at girls, an older woman might snap at him, ‘Looks like your dalli is swaying a bit too much these days, is it?’ Or an older man might say, ‘The zaar (amniotic fluid that sticks to the baby’s skin when it is born) on your face is yet to dry up, and you’re already behaving like this?’

Chalbat/chilbat

These are thin inferior pieces of meat. When the animal is cut open and its organs are separated, thin layers of tissue covering the organs fall off. These are known as chalbat or chilbat. It stretches like a rubber sheet when pulled. Children used to make temporary dhimadya, dimadya, timkya (musical instruments) from the chilbat by stretching it over small thin iron boxes, round pots, broken sieves and so on. When this dries, it makes a sharp, thin sound. In Urdu and Hindi, kites are called cheel. These birds can skilfully lift and take off with thin pieces of chilbat placed on a plate. Kites like chalbat and simply swallow it—perhaps that’s why the word ‘chalbat’ or ‘chilbat’. Demeaning phrases related to this would be used to hurl insults: at women, addressing them as ‘chalbat eaters’, and at men as ‘chalbat lickers’. The wise shall deduce the double entendre.

Chati-boti/chichade

This is a very inferior part of meat. Slightly different than chalbat, it is the little scraps of membrane and tendons that are on or in the meat. While sorting the meat according to the quality and the organs, small pieces of tissue stick to the fingers and the knife. It is just like chewing-gum, bubble-gum or sticky phlegm. Kasab women call it chichade or chithade. Maybe this came from chithade in Hindi or Urdu, meaning very insignificant fragments. While cleaning and cutting the meat, women used to flick the chichade stuck on their fingers on to the walls, where they would remain stuck a long time.

Children used to make a temporary musical instrument with this as well. Cats and dogs would play with chichade for a long time but they could not swallow them at the first go. One common phrase from Kasab women was, ‘A cat sees chichade in her dreams.’ Of course, a cat’s dreams are so mediocre and limited that

they will only have chichade! People used to bring chichade from the butchers' shop making an excuse for food for their cats and dogs and make curry for themselves.

Kaas/khiri (udder)

Kaas is a separate group of mammary glands which does not contain blood. It is milky white. Although the recipe is similar to that of meat, kaas takes less time to cook. The taste is unique. The gravy should be thick.

Aand (testicles)

These are cooked along with regular meat. They become soft like cheese when cooked.

Khur/paay/paaya (Hooves/trotters/lower legs)

The animal's legs below their knees, the trotters, are known as khur (hooves) or paaya. They test the patience of the cook. Thick and long pieces of wood had to be specially arranged. Legs would be skinned and cleaned thoroughly. Some people would roast them. The nails (hooves) had to be removed. Khur was more bones than meat. Larger implements such as an axe were used to cut them into pieces. The khur were left to cook in a large pot on a separate stove, beneath which a large piece of wood was kept burning slowly. The rich aroma of this slow cooking would spread all around. The soup was served hot. It was used as a treatment for back pain, coughs, colds and general weakness, besides being a special treat for every food lover.

Khur stock, when ready, is sticky like sugar syrup. The fingers of the ones who ate this soup or gravy would get sticky and messy. This stickiness would attest to the quality of the meat. This type of food really tests the cook's patience but gives immense joy to eaters. Crushed thick crispy bhakri mixed with khur curry gave the complete satisfaction of a wholesome meal. Drinking this hot and spicy curry would make one's ears and nose steam with pleasure.

Recipe

Ingredients

1. Khur, cleaned and chopped into chunks
2. Yesur
3. Salt

Method

1. Place a large pot three-quarters full of water on a slow fire.
2. Add the chopped khur.
3. Let it simmer for five to six hours. The resultant stock should feel sticky when a drop is rubbed between finger and thumb.
4. Add yesur and salt, both to taste. Cook a few minutes longer.
5. Serve hot.

A particular adhesive used specially to stick and bind the cardboard covers for books, especially for thick books, was made from animal bone powder. That's why there was a peculiar smell while boiling this gum. Books made from this gum would stay intact for longer.

Khima/kheema/kima (minced meat)

The process of mincing fleshy boneless parts of mutton is called 'making kheema' and the minced meat is known as kheema. Sometimes bones may also be minced along with the meat. In the absence of butchers, expert housewives would cut the meat into small pieces and mash them in a large ukhal or mortar and pestle.

Some would put the pieces in a thick piece of cloth and hammer it with a wooden rod. Kheema can be cooked in two ways.

Dry kheema and kheema curry

Kheema can be prepared without cooking it separately beforehand. Though the basic method is the same in both dry kheema and kheema curry, the taste is different. Some women who were expert chefs used to marinate the kheema. The quantity of onions, water, salt and spices depend on how many people have to be fed. Kheema tastes excellent with bhakri or chapati.

Ingredients

1. Kheema
2. Turmeric
3. Salt
4. Charbi (animal fat) or oil
5. Lots of onions, finely chopped (the amount depends on how many people are to be served)
6. Ginger-garlic, paste or finely chopped; whatever is available
7. Yesoor or red chili
8. Green coriander, chopped

Method

1. Mix the mince with turmeric and salt, rubbing it in well. Set aside.
2. Put a pan or wok on the stove with a medium-hot fire. Add fat or oil.
3. When the fat is hot, add and sauté the onions. When the onions are pale golden and translucent, but before they turn brown, add whatever seasoning is available—the ginger-garlic pieces or paste, yesur or red chilli powder. Stir and fry.
4. Add salt and coriander. Mix well.
5. Now add the marinated kheema and mix thoroughly. Keep stirring, breaking up any lumps of mince that form. Mince needs constant stirring, scraping the bottom of the pan with the spatula, to prevent it sticking and burning.
6. When it looks done, dry kheema is ready.
7. To feed more people, change this into kheema curry: add water and stir.
8. Adjust salt and spices as needed.
9. When the curry boils, it is ready. Serve hot.

Kheema can be pre-cooked and then used in the above recipe. The taste differs in both the versions.

Undwar (mesentery)

The abdominal viscera that form the digestive tract—stomach, intestines and so on—in an animal's body are stored in a thin membranous bag like a bundle of clothes stuffed together. This entire lining is called 'undwar' or mesentery. This cluster of organs is also known as dedaale or dedali. Rich farmers' healthy animals have layers of fat on the peritoneum and diaphragm. When the carcass is cut open, this entire bag is carefully removed first. Later it is cut open and the organs in it are taken out and cleaned for use. It contains the stomach, small intestine, large intestine, and finally aambla or aambalgath (rectum or the last part of large intestine opening to to anal cavity. The quality of intestines depends on how the animal dies. If the animal is healthy, it has fat on its intestines.

It is easier to skin and cut the animal immediately after death. If the animal has been dead for long or if it has died from indigestion, then its stomach will be totally swollen. A stench is released the moment the

peritoneum of such an animal is torn. It is also used as a metaphor when someone's fart smells too much. People would ask, 'Who's farting as if an undwar is being torn apart?'

Within the undwar is the parkand or stomach. It has four sections. One part looks like a quilt, another like a Turkish towel and another looks like a honeycomb with a hexagonal pattern. It contains undigested food. To keep the rest of the meat tidy and clean, it has to be gently taken out, and then torn and emptied out. The undigested herbaceous mixture in the digestive tract of animals is called 'charbat'. In villages, street-smart kids are called 'charbat' or 'chabra'. In Marathi, junk food is known as 'arbat-charbat'. People suffering from excessive body heat and those with overheated feet and palms were advised to keep their feet and palms in the fresh luke-warm charbat to cool them down. Charbat has one more utility value: it is used as an excellent organic manure. Citrus trees fruit quickly when charbat is used as manure.

You need a lot of water to wash and clean the undwar. This water is used as a remedy for freckles. People superstitiously referred to freckles as 'Brahmin' and believed they would disappear once you applied water used for washing animal intestines. Many examples of its success stories were cited.

Undwar and charbat of some buffaloes used to stink as they would engage in irwad, meaning eating human faeces. (Coprophagy is the result of a lack of certain nutrients in the diet, or to get enzymes for digestive processes.) '*Irwad karne'* literally means to diversify—a farmer growing mixed crops was known as irwad; some buffaloes ate a mixed diet, so it was also called irwad. They would graze in the forest the entire day and yet they would eat human faeces on their way back. Some cows also have this habit. Women used to avoid collecting the dung of such buffaloes and cows.

Wajadi (intestines)

Wajadi is not necessarily liked by everyone. Even amongst those who like it, some people prefer only the part that looks like a Turkish towel, while others prefer the part that looks like a honeycomb. The preparation of wajadi depended on ingredients available in the household.

Recipe 1

Ingredients

1. Thoroughly washed and cleaned wajadi, chopped
2. Salt
3. Turmeric
4. Ginger-garlic paste or in pieces; whatever is available (optional)
5. Green coriander, chopped

Method

1. Heat a pan or wok and put in the chopped wajadi. Wajadi has fat, so it does not need added fat or oil.
2. Add salt and turmeric and mix. Add the ginger-garlic pieces or paste, if desired.
3. Cook, while stirring, for an hour and a half.
4. Add as much hot water as desired and cook a little longer. For those who like it plain, the dish is ready.
5. For a spicier version, add any other spices you like, and cook a little longer.
6. Garnish with coriander and serve.

Recipe 2

Ingredients

1. All the ingredients of Recipe 1 above

2. Red chilli powder
3. Crushed peanuts

Method

1. Add powdered peanuts with the red chilli powder. Cook the gravy, stirring constantly, till it becomes smooth.
2. Serve garnished with coriander.

Recipe 3

Ingredients

1. All the ingredients of recipe 1 above
2. Yesur
3. Red chilli powder
4. Bajra or jowar flour (roasted)

Method

1. To make the gravy thicker, mix jowar or bajra flour with the yesur and red chilli powder and then add it to the gravy and cook for a few minutes.
2. Garnish with coriander.

Recipe 4

Use the kheema recipe given before.

Recipe 5

1. Cook wajadi using kheema recipe.
2. Reduce heat. Add bhakri pieces and cover. Once the bhakri pieces are steamed, the gravy is ready to eat. Do not use chapati pieces as that doesn't taste good.

Recipe 6

Prepare the wajadi using a recipe for regular meat curry.

Some adept women used to keep some parts of the intestines aside. They would fill cooked rice in these pieces and tie the ends with thread. These stuffed pieces would then be cooked along with other meat. The taste of this rice is unique.

It is to be noted that no matter how well and how many times you wash your hands after eating wajadi, the smell won't leave you for the entire day.

Mutton (meat)

Most people in Maharashtra would use the word 'mutton' to refer to the meat of any animal. Raw meat and curry both were known as mutton. The method of preparing mutton at home was different from the method of cooking it on a large scale for public meals.

Meat was not something that was available anytime you wished. If an animal died, its edible part would be reserved for the appointed balutedar Mahar (or occasionally Mang) families. Other Mahars and Mangs would get their share only after this.

The Muslim khatik, kasab or Mulani started to occupy the position of appointed butchers in southern India after the arrival of Alauddin Khilji and the demise of the Yadavs of Devagiri (before Independence, Maharashtra was considered part of south India). But khatiks were doing this task prior to this. Hindu khatiks worked as butchers for upper-caste Hindus. This fifth category of Mahars and Mangs always bore the traditional responsibility of disposing dead animals that were considered 'sacred' while alive and 'impure' after death. There were many economic and social reasons behind the consumption of meat of dead animals. Meat wasn't available anytime you desired! The khatiks' shops in weekly markets were the only option for procuring meat regularly. But who had the money to buy meat on a weekly basis? During the monsoon when it rained heavily, just like humans, animals would also fall sick and die more often. This season was a hunger trap for poor and lower castes. They would lose their daily wages due to continuous rains and deplete their food stocks rapidly. In such situations, dependence on dead animals for food was high. Sometimes, when possible, they turned to fresh meat and sometimes (if they had any) 'chaanya' (dried/processed meat) that was made in the summer and stored.

Sometimes animals did not die naturally for long periods. In times of dire shortage of food grains, someone would dare to give shendur (lead II, IV oxide), bittya or roots of the kanheri shrub mixed into dough to one of the animals. These natural poisons would work their way into the animal and they would die in a day or two. If the animal died due to snake-bite, the experts decided whether it was edible or not and which part was edible. The amount of poisoning could be determined by the colour of the animal's mesentery, depending on how dark a blue-black colour it turned. Many people must have died of diarrhoea and vomiting after eating such contaminated, poisonous meat. But it is not recorded anywhere in history. There are records of drought-caused deaths, but who would record the deaths of people with their stomachs full? Elders narrate the incidents of attacks on these castes or their eviction by the village on suspicion of poisoning their animals. Sometimes some animals died of indigestion. If they ate jowar in large quantities on the day of harvest, it would swell in their stomach and the animals would die.

Some people from these communities did not eat the meat of dead animals out of self-respect or under the influence of certain religious sects. Some people used to buy a weak animal at cheap rates before the rains and feed it with fodder to make it healthy. Its meat came in handy on a rainy day. Depending on how much and what kind of meat was received as a family's share, experienced women would decide on its recipe. Meat of the dead animals was distributed among the Dalit households of the village in shares determined by the senior most, or most influential, Dalit man. He would also determine which body parts to be given away and to whom. It is difficult to preserve meat in the rainy season. Entire villages would fall prey to the pandemics of cholera and other diseases. The survival of these castes up to today's hygienic, sanitized world should be attributed to their unrelenting attitude and the strong will to survive in their genes. Perhaps this is why many artistes were born in these castes who lived happily, singing and performing in such dire poverty. The proverb '*Ati zaala ani hasu aala* [if it becomes too much, just laugh it off]' is perfect for them. The people from these castes, who laughed at their own existence through life and death, and made others laugh, progressed later with changing perspectives. But the casteist attitude towards them still persists albeit in different forms.

The previously cited example of the 'fashi' joke in tamasha and cuss words, proverbs and phrases used by women in their quarrels were all a part of their daily lives. I had heard a paalana (a song sung during the naming ceremony of babies to pacify them and to celebrate this occasion) which had twelve stanzas describing the twelve days of a newborn child. I remember the first few lines. It will be my pleasure if an elderly lady could complete it for me. Although this song is humorous, it also states the hard facts of Dalit life.

Aaribandar Boribandar boricha faata
Kaapili mhais taakila waata
Tona thokatana futala paata
Jo bala, jo jo re jo …

Aaribandar, Boribandar, what a fun fair
Cut the buffalo, give me my share.
The stone broke while crushing the bone
Sleep, O baby, sleep in your zone.

Pahilya diwashi khandili nhaani
Mandi bolati khaatakaachi raani
Chanya bhaajataana tondala paani
Jo bala, jo jo re jo ...

On the first day, they sharpened the knife
Business is slow, said the butcher's wife.
Mouths water when the meat is fried
Sleep, O baby, sleep on this side.

Dusarya diwashi dusaricha raada
Kaalij-bokyani bharalya daadha
Ganya dada tumhi fardul wadha
Jo bala ...

On the second day, rises the choler
Liver and kidneys, stuck in the molar.
Hey you mister, mind the ladle
Sleep, O baby, sleep in the cradle.

Tisarya diwashi tisaricha raada
Kutrya–manjarani bharala waada
Ambalgathicha sutala tidaa
Jo bala ...

On the third day, got a lot of meat
Cats 'n' dogs gather in the street.
The chunks are a bounty, have a look
Sleep, O baby, sleep in your nook …

This lullaby must have been composed by women who had been to Mumbai, one guesses from the mention of Boribandar. The present-day Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus or the erstwhile Victoria Terminus was known as Boribandar before that.

The housewives used to come up with many tricks to preserve the extra meat when the animal died. Perishable organs like intestines, liver, kidneys, etc., would be cooked immediately. They would keep a burning cow-dung-cake beneath the pan so that it stayed hot for a longer time and did not get spoiled. The same method was used for bone marrow and other meat. This way they stretched the edibility to three to four days. If there were only a few pieces of extra mutton, they would be cut thin and hung around the cooking area for drying. When the meat dried, it was called sukekhand (dry pieces). If a large quantity of good-quality mutton was left, then longer, thicker strips were hung out for drying. This process looked similar to how the fisherfolk dry Bombay duck (bombil fish). These dried thin strips were called chaanya.

Chaani

In Konkan, the squirrel is known as chaani. But this is a different chaani. Its plural is chaanya. Chaanya would dry up in two to four days in the summer. But during monsoons and in humid weather, the house would be filled with a peculiar smell of wet meat. Crows, cats and dogs constantly circled the area because of

the smell. Dried chaanya would be stored carefully in large clay pots. They were taken out and sunned from time to time. Otherwise, worms would form in it. In the monsoons or in any season when there was scarcity of mutton or food, chaanya came in handy.

Before making curry or any other recipe, cut the chaanya to the length of one-third of a finger and roast the pieces on a hot tava. Because of the fat content in chaanya, it releases oil. The aroma while roasting is heady and intoxicating.

Cooking tips

1. Roasted chaanya by itself tastes outstanding.
2. Make a curry just like a regular mutton curry.
3. Sick people should be served roasted chaanya with a sprinkling of some yesur over it to activate their taste buds.
4. Chaanya can be cooked according to the kheema recipe as a quick fix for unannounced guests.
5. Chaanya can be added in dals or vegetable curries.
6. Roasted chaanya is popular as an accompaniment to alcohol.

A vital piece of information is that chaanya is a traditionally and naturally dried form of mutton without any chemical or sped-up processes, and that is why it cooks very quickly.

Traditional recipes to cook meat

Fresh pieces of meat, while being chopped, would be transferred into a pan with water. After the cutting process was over, all the pieces would be washed in the pan. Alternatively, some people would wash the pieces under running water. Meat weighed anything from under a kilogram to three kilograms or sometimes even more. The pot in which the meat was to be cooked was coated on the outside with a thin layer of ash mixed with wet mud before putting it on the chool. This made it easier to clean the pot later.

Recipe 1

Ingredients

1. Meat, cut in pieces and washed
2. Salt
3. Turmeric
4. Yesur or chilli powder

Method

1. Put the meat in a pot with salt and turmeric, mix, and place on slow fire. The meat releases its own juices.
2. Cover with a plate and pour a little water into the plate, so the pieces don’t burn.
3. After the meat has cooked for a while, add hot water.
4. Add yesur or chilli powder and mix. Taste for salt; add more if needed. Cover and cook till meat is done.
5. Serve with bhakri.

Recipe 2

Ingredients

1. Meat, cut in pieces and washed

2. Salt
3. Chilli powder
4. Peanut powder

Method

1. Prepare and put the meat in a pot as in preceding recipe, adding salt and chilli powder as well. Cook in the same way.
2. When the meat is done, add hot water and peanut powder. Taste for salt; add more if needed. Cover and cook till the meat is done.

Recipe 3

Ingredients

1. Meat, cut in pieces and washed
2. Salt
3. Turmeric
4. Chilli powder
5. Bajra or jowar flour

Method

1. Cook the meat as in Recipe 1 till you have added hot water. Cook till meat is done.
2. Roast jowar or bajra flour on a tava and immediately tip into a small bowl.
3. Into the roasted flour add chilli powder and salt, and enough water to make a smooth paste, breaking any lumps formed.
4. Pour the smooth paste into the boiling meat and stir constantly while cooking for a few minutes. This makes a thick and tasty gravy.

Recipe 4

Ingredients

1. Meat, cut in pieces and washed
2. Salt
3. Turmeric
4. Onions, whole
5. Green or red chillies
6. Coriander seeds
7. Dried coconut (if available), a piece, grated or chopped small

Method

1. Prepare the meat as in Recipe 1, adding hot water.
2. While the meat is cooking, roast whole onions in the coals of the fire (or on a low flame)
3. Peel the roasted onions and chop them roughly.
4. Grind the onions, chillies, coriander seeds and coconut on a grinding stone (for the best flavour) or in an electric grinder.
5. Put the ground masala into the pot with the boiling meat. Mix well and cook till meat is done.

Recipe 5

Ingredients for marinade

1. Meat, cut in pieces
2. Ginger-garlic paste
3. Turmeric
4. Salt
5. Coriander leaves

Ingredients for cooking

1. Animal fat or oil
2. Onions, chopped finely
3. Yesur
4. Salt
5. Roasted jowar or bajra flour
6. Green coriander leaves, chopped

Method

1. Mix the meat with the ginger-garlic paste, turmeric powder, salt and coriander leaves. Let it rest half an hour, while you prepare the tempering.
2. Chop the onions finely.
3. Heat oil or fat in a pot, add the chopped onions and fry till brown.
4. Add the marinated meat. Mix well and sauté.
5. Cover with a plate and pour water into it. No water is added to the meat for the first 15–20 minutes.
6. Now empty the remaining water in the plate into the meat. Add extra hot water according to how many people have to be fed.
7. When it has cooked a bit, take out some soup for the kids and the elderly.
8. In a small bowl, mix the yesur, salt and roasted jowar or bajra flour. Put it in the pot of meat. Add green coriander if available. Mix well, cover and cook on low heat.
9. When bubbles start popping on the surface, it indicates the curry is ready. There is no need to add an extra tempering of chilli powder to the cooked mutton as it has already been tempered with onions and yesur.

Recipe 6

The ingredients and marination are the same as above.

Method

1. Put the marinated meat with the marinade in a pan or wok and place on the fire.
2. Let it cook a little, stirring occasionally.
3. Cover with the plate and put some water in the plate. Lower heat and cook till done.
4. In another pan, put some fat or oil.
5. Add chopped onions and fry till brown.
6. Add yesur or chilli powder. Stir and fry a little and add to the boiling meat.

Yesur is not added directly to the hot oil or fat because there is a risk of it getting burnt and spoiling the taste of the entire dish.

Recipe 7

1. Cook the meat in any of the above ways.
2. Add masala, yesur or any chutney to the prepared mutton. Serve with bhakri.

Some people have the misconception that Muslims only eat non-vegetarian food. There was a similar misconception about these two castes, the Mahars and Mangs, as well. There still is. On the contrary, meat was and still is not affordable. Due to this, individuals and families eating meat on a daily basis are a rare exception. In fact, it can be easily said that the majority in India eat non-vegetarian food only occasionally. Moreover, a significant number of people do not eat meat during Shravan, festivals, fasting days, days observed for certain deities and so on. Most non-vegetarian families cannot afford to eat meat more than once a week.

Assuming there are five people in a family, 500–750 gm meat would be bought. Even if we assume that everyone gets equal shares, each person gets 100–150 gm of meat. These numbers speak of averages—this small amount is not actually equally shared. Women still do not get to eat in the first serving. They are usually the last ones to eat and have to make do with whatever leftovers come their way.

5

Sacrifices, sacred feasts, farming and festivities

Even before the advent of Islam in Maharashtra in the thirteenth century with Alauddin Khilji's conquest of Deogiri, non-vegetarianism was an integral part of the religious and festive way of life in Hindu culture.

The focus and intention of this chapter is not to elaborate on this but to write about the food culture that has survived as an insignificant fraction at the bottom of the social hierarchy. From pre-Buddhist times to the time of Emperor Ashoka, animals like bullocks, buffaloes, horses, sheep, goats and chicken were sacrificed for various reasons and rituals. Although pigs and buffaloes were not sacrificed as per the Vedic tradition, non-Vedic communities (Dalit, nomadic, tribals) continued to sacrifice these animals. This tradition continues even today.

Sacrifices and sacred feasts

In Vedic culture, it was a custom to sacrifice domesticated or other easily available animals. It is said that chicken, goats and sheep originated in Central Asia and Afghanistan. Those who migrated with hing (asafoetida) may have brought these animals with them. The people of the yajna culture used mainly goats, sheep, bulls, castrated bullocks, horses, infertile cows and occasionally birds for sacrifice. They also used nutritious foods such as toop (clarified butter or ghee), curd made from cow's milk and the milk itself as essential ingredients for the ritual of yajna.

In the Mahabharata, according to the story of the rakshasa brothers Vatapi and Ilwal, sheep were slaughtered at their annual memorial feast for the dead and this feast was prepared by Brahmins. According to another story, Satyavrata hunted wild animals to feed the rishi Vishwamitra's family during famine. When the animals were not available, Satyavrata stole a cow belonging to Vashishta (another rishi) and it was eaten by Vishwamitra's family. Vashishta was infuriated by the fact that they stole a useful, lactating cow and did not even perform a ritual which was usually done before sacrificing a lactating cow. But Vishwamitra was pleased with Satyavrata because he saved his family from starvation.

In another story, Vishwamitra had gone to a Dalit locality (of the Chandal community) during a severe famine and tried to steal a haunch of meat (the leg) from the fresh meat of dogs hanging there. One of the Dalits said that stealing and eating dog meat was blasphemy for a Brahmin. Vishwamitra argued with him about religion and philosophy and finally offered yajna and only ate the dog meat afterwards.

In a story narrating the generosity of the King Shibi, he offered rice and beef to Indra, the king of gods (who was disguised as an eagle), to save Agni, the god of fire (who was disguised as a dove).

According to another incident cited in the Mahabharata, Dharmavyadha, who knew the profoundest secrets of dharma (righteousness and religion), was making ends meet by selling the meat of pigs and buffaloes in the city of Mithila. Brahmins would often go to him there for religious lessons. The list of such examples is endless.

The movement that started from Emperor Ashoka's time to push society into vegetarianism is still actively going on. At the same time, in one way or the other, symbolically or in real terms, killing animals as a sacrifice is popular even today. All the meat is consumed after offering a small portion of the animal to please the deity. If we look at the local context, we find references to buffalo sacrifice in the *Gaathasaptshati*. There

are also references to butchers in the pre-Islamic era. This book, also known as *Hal Saatvaahanaachi Gaathasaptshati*, is important as it chronicles the food culture of this region, that is, the present-day Marathwada.

If we analyse the current or past few generations of non-vegetarian people, it is clear that mainly herbivorous animals are used as food. Animals used as sacrifice to gods during festivals are also grass-eaters. These include goats, sheep, buffaloes and, in rare cases, even pregnant goats and sheep for some fierce deities. The chicken is a common bird used for sacrificial rites. Over time, some animals were dropped from this list.

Kshatriyas were not forbidden to eat meat other than beef. Although there are five distinct varnas in Maharashtra, it is found that the same gods and goddesses are worshipped by all five varnas as their family deities. Brahmins offer vegetarian, sweet food (without salt) to their deities but Kshatriyas, Bahujans and Dalits offer non-vegetarian food to the same deities.

Palms are drenched in the hot blood of the sacrificed animal and imprinted on the clothes of the host on his chest. (Nowadays, it has been replaced by kumkum.) If this sacrifice is done at home, then it is customary to imprint blood-soaked palms on and around the main door of the house. Perhaps the motive was to make children of warrior communities accustomed to seeing blood early on.

Sacrifices of goats and buffaloes are still performed at the shakti pithas (significant shrines and temples in the goddess-focused Hindu tradition). The goddesses killed the demons to save society from their menace. This is why these goddesses are often named after the demons, such as Mahishasuramardini (the One who killed Mahishasura).

In Maharashtra, the sacrifices offered to goddesses or gods, other than by Dalits and nomadic tribes, are usually of goats, sheep and chicken. Dalits and nomadic tribes sacrificed bullocks, buffaloes and pigs; later they started offering goats, sheep and chickens too. There are descriptions of male buffaloes decorated for sacrifice in the *Hal Saatvaahanaachi Gaathasaptshati*. In Karnataka, it was customary to offer a male buffalo in front of the Goddess Marikamba (worshipped by non-Dalits as well) of Sirsi. Even though this practice was discontinued, the practice of permanently tying a male buffalo in her name in the front yard of the temple continues till date. When the buffalo dies in the natural course of its life, another one is brought. People still bow their heads at the place where the buffalo used to be tied at the Kali Mata temple at Pavagadh in Gujarat. In Assam, many animals, right from the pigeon to the male buffalo, are still sacrificed in front of the goddess Kamakhya in Guwahati. Sacrifices are still practised in Kali Mata temples in Bengal and Tripura.

A simple sign to find out whether animal sacrifice was or is common in a particular temple is the existence of havankund or yajnakund (places meant for making yajna fire where sacrifices were common). The practice of sacrificing buffaloes has come to an end in temples having predominantly upper-caste devotees.

Apart from these temple sacrifices, there are multiple other occasions where animal sacrifice is common. These include marriages, first head-shaving of a male child, handover of a ‘devachi pardi’ due to the passing away of the previous holder. (Devachi pardi is a basket containing idols of gods and other religious paraphernalia. It is considered that one member per family is responsible for all religious–ritualistic observance pertaining to the respective family deity and the basket is a symbol of this responsibility.) Apart from animal sacrifice, several other rituals are followed on such occasions, such as inviting aradhi and waghya–murali (male and female religious artists) to sing and dance to devotional songs.

In the month of Ashadh (which falls during July–August), animals had to be sacrificed for Mari-aai, Laxmi-aai, Mhasoba, Satvaai, Ranu-bai, and others. The minimum sacrifice required was that of a chicken.

Satvaai puja was performed every Ashadh. A babool (acacia) tree near the village was identified and five stones were placed in front of it. A piece of cloth was laid out and betel nut, haldi-kunku, and jowar, wheat or rice were placed on it as offerings for the puja. Some people offered chicken while others put offerings of eggs or kalvan-bhakri (any kind of curry and flatbread). This puja was performed to pacify the goddess Satvaai and protect the children from the goddess’s fury. (It was believed that diseases such as smallpox and chicken pox were a result of the goddess’s anger). Everyone would eat a meal (made from the offerings) together near the babool tree.

Navachandi, also known as Chandi Devi, had destroyed several demons. She was praised by the gods and sages for this bravery; pleased, the goddess granted them a boon. She said that whoever worshipped her in the month of Ashadh by offering animals as sacrifice would be protected from demons and ghosts. They would prosper in every way. (Markandeya Purana, 89.) A similar story is found in Skanda Purana, Avanti Khand, 77. All these stories emphasize the importance of animal sacrifice in the month of Ashadh.

Perhaps this is why, as a couterbalance, Ashadhi Ekadashi was given so much importance in the Warkari sect (a pure-vegetarian sect formed during the thirteenth-century Bhakti movement for all castes who primarily worship Vitthal and follow most saints such as Dnyaneshwar, Tukaram, Chokhoba and Janabai) to oppose the traditional practice of animal sacrifice during this month. Ashadhi Ekadashi (the eleventh day in the month of Ashadh) is considered sacred and devotees observe a strict fast.

Another form of Satvaai Devi is worshipped as well. She is also called Ranchi-aai—mother of the forest. When a child is one-and-a-quarter months old, it is taken out of the house for the first time specifically for this puja. This puja is similar to the one mentioned earlier. People make anklets for the child. Some people make mutke (balls of jowar or any food grain), circle them around the child and throw them away. This is believed to ward off the evil eye.

A type of Satvaai puja was performed at home in the days when indoor bathrooms were not common. The day the baby was born, a shallow bathing area or nahaani was dug inside the house for the mother and newborn for immediate use after childbirth. Women were not permitted to step out of the house for the first few days after childbirth, as it was considered unhealthy and inauspicious. This nahaani was used every day thereafter. On the fifth day, this temporary bathroom was decorated and a puja performed. This was because it was believed that Satvaai would come to write the fate of the child on its forehead on the fifth day. On the twelfth day, after the bathing of baby and mother, the bathroom was again decorated and, after performing a puja, closed down forever.

Satvaai or Shashthi (which means sixth) was born from the sixth element of nature, hence the name. She is the first amongst the seven reigning mother goddesses such as Mari-aai, Ranubai, and others who are popular amongst matriarchal communities. Her mythological name is Devasena, and she is the wife of Skanda. She is known to offer a long life to children. She is their protector and constant companion. A lamp is kept burning constantly on the fifth night after childbirth. Here is her story:

Manu is considered the first man in Hindu mythology. His son Priyavrat was engrossed in penance. But later he got married as per the order of Brahma. Kashyapa performed the putrakameshti yajna (a yajna performed to wish for a male child). His wife duly became pregnant. It was indeed a son, but he was stillborn. The infant was taken to the burial ground (babies are not cremated). There appeared a goddess. She revealed: ‘I am Devasena Shashthi.’ She brought the child back to life. Then she ordered everyone to worship her. Priyavrat worshipped her on the sixth day after the birth of his child and thus began the practice of worshipping her on the sixth day of childbirth. (Brahmavaivarta Purana, Prakruti Khand, 43)

It is possible that this tradition percolated from the lower classes to upper ones, as many such popular primitive folktales in the oral tradition found their way into the Puranas, which are estimated to have been composed between 350 and 750 ce.

Another thanksgiving feast is the navas. When someone petitions a deity and the wish is fulfilled, they show their gratitude by offering animal sacrifices. Moreover, if a navas is undertaken at the dargah (tomb or shrine of a pir or Muslim saint), a kanduri is organized. A kanduri is a feast for close relatives, given when the wish is fulfilled. This practice is followed by both Hindus and Muslims. Usually, only goats are sacrificed for a kanduri. Similarly, a goat was also sacrificed for the inauguration of new wells. The untouchable labourers who dug the well could not touch the water though, as noted earlier.

Farming, festivals and feasts

A dhawara was organized when the jowar harvest was brought home from the fields. Dhawara is a continuing tradition in the local farming culture, of preparing a sacred meal to celebrate a harvest.

The dhawara preparations start from the new moon of Diwali. On this day, the Pandavas, the five brothers who are the heroes of the Mahabharata, are worshipped in the fields. Five small stones in the field are painted with chuna (limewash) as a symbol of the Pandavas. Wheat flour dough is steamed in different shapes such as plain balls, fruits or lamps and these are used as a naivedya (devotional offering to God), along with dried dates, dry coconut, ambil (sour buttermilk infused with chillies, coriander, etc.), kadhi (tempered chickpea–buttermilk curry), wadya (gram flour soaked and steamed). Shendur (lead II, IV oxide, a red powder with ritual significance) and a morva (a medium-sized earthen pot) are also placed there. Jowar pachundas were stood upright in five stacks on the ground before the stones and a lamp is lighted in the pot. In the evening, this morva is buried carefully near the symbolic Pandavas.

A similar puja was performed during Yel Amavasya (the new moon night that falls in January). This Yel Amavasya puja is still a common and notable festival related to farming in the Ashmak region, which comprises areas of present-day Maharashtra and Karnataka.

In the rabi season, jowar stalks were pulled out by the roots while still green (if cobs were allowed to ripen, the grain would shed in the field) and tied together and then the process of threshing the grain started. The khale, a circular space of ground, was prepared beforehand as a threshing floor. The mud surface was rammed and watered regularly to make it smooth, solid and sturdy. A tivda, a twelve-foot cylindrical wooden pole, was erected in the centre—the bullocks were tied to the tivda and circled it to trample and thresh the harvested cobs. The morva that had been buried near the Pandava stones was brought and placed or buried near the tivda.

Fresh green jowar cobs, which were still moist, were laid out to dry on the khale and tossed around by an implement called the datala (a kind of farm fork) so that each cob was exposed to sunlight. Dried cobs were spread in the khale and bullocks would circle in the khale, trampling them. This would separate the grains from the cobs and dehusk them. The grains would be stored in heaps. Then, considering the wind direction, the grains would be winnowed to separate the kernels from the husks.

All these tasks were done by Mang men and women. They would manually separate the good kernels from the remnants of the husks, particles and dust. Aghada (*Achyranthes aspera*) is a medicinal plant used in the auspicious months of Shravan–Bhadrapad for worshipping Lord Ganesh. Mang folks would make brooms from the long, thin stems of the fully grown aghada plant. These brooms were called haatni, and were used to separate hollow cobs, good kernels and spoilt kernels. In this way, piles of white jowar were separated. Hollow cobs would be beaten again to extract the remaining jowar kernels. Spoilt kernels were also beaten again to remove the unwanted particles and the good grains were extracted.

The bullocks' muzzles were tied with cotton cloth to prevent them from eating the cobs and jowar. There were instances when the bullocks accidentally ate good grains and died due to bloating. Often these bullocks would defecate during the threshing. It was not referred to as 'the bullock has shat' but a special phrase was used which meant 'the bullock has overflown'. Mang workers would catch the dung in their hands at the right time and throw it out of the threshing floor. They had to be vigilant as it could come anytime.

However, if the dung accidently fell on the threshing floor, the workers would use as much of such spoilt grains as possible after cleaning them. There were also some people who would wash, dry and grind the grains picked out of the bullocks' dung and use them for flour.

When the threshed grains piled up, the morva would be filled with these fresh grains. It was considered auspicious to fill it up and let a Mang worker lift it first. This ritual was called '*pendha bharne'*. The Mang workers would shout, '*Mhasubacha chang bhal* (praise the Lord Mhasoba)!' Only after this was the grain harvest carried home.

Some people's khale used to be operational for a month and a half. Dhawara—the special feast—was organized after this work was over. For this ceremony, male goats were slaughtered and sweet sanja (porridge) of new jowar was made. Invitations were sent out to alutedars, balutedars, servants who worked on the khale, close friends, neighbours, relatives and so on. It was a kind of relaxation and rejuvenation after all the labour. Some people would take their grain home only after dhawara had taken place.

Although the khale had been carefully prepared to ensure that the ground was smooth and grit would not be mixed with the good grains, some grains would get pressed into the floor of the khale. Such jowar was called

matere (soiled). The phrase, *ayushyache matere jhale*—life has been wasted—may have been inspired by this.

This matere would be taken home by some poor people. Sieves made by village artisans such as Vaidu or Kaikadi (nomadic tribes—the former were healers as well) were used to separate the soil, gond (the delicate yet sharp part covering each grain which pricks in the throat if eaten) and small stones. The matere would be put in these sieves and shaken vigorously in flowing water. The soil would dissolve. The small stones would be washed away. Gond used to float on the water and would be thrown out. The jowar in the matere was dried and then bigger stones would be picked out of it. Such was the complicated and elaborate method of getting grain from the matere. A similar process was followed for other grains also.

Now most of these processes are automated.

During the harvesting season, men and women from Mang and other castes would go on a bhikna (asking for seeds). They would receive the grain from the richer farmers and would use this gift only as seeds for sowing and not for eating.

Just like the upper castes, these two castes, Mahar and Mang, also had a tradition of carrying the paradi of the goddess in their hands. Some of their family deities were the same as those of the upper castes. Therefore jagran and gondhal (religious songs and dances performed by traditional folk artists) in marriage, other devotional work, first head-shaving of a male child, kanduri and all such rituals were part of the life of these two castes as well. Even today the Mang community observes all these practices.

In most rituals, it was customary to sacrifice a goat. In the month of Ashadh, it was mandatory to sacrifice the chicken in front of Ranchi-aai, Laxmi-aai and Mhasoba. Goddess Ranubai, that is, Ranchi-aai would demand at least a chicken. Those who had Shetibai (Satvaai) as their family deity would sacrifice a paat—a young female goat. Another type of sacrifice was of that of an aatkhuri sheep or goat. Aatkhuri means one having eight khurs (hooves): its own four hooves and four of the foetus; in other words, pregnant.

It was common to skip certain rituals during wedding ceremonies due to monetary constraints. In such cases the parents' pending rituals would be performed in their children's weddings. Daka, a large percussion instrument, would be played before or after a wedding. The playing of the daka is a ritual to calm down the dakini or jakhini, an evil spirit. Compared to gondhal or other rituals, this one is more tantric and elaborate. The daka players used to play drums all night in a single engaging monotone: *dum-dum-dum*. In the same slow rhythm, they would sing sombre songs in lugubrious voices.

The nature of the sacrifice of the pregnant sheep offered to the goddess Mesaai (possibly an aggressive avatar of Bolaidevi) was hair-raising. The sheep was made to stand on the threshold of the house and its head was chopped off in a single stroke.

Suti-ruti

According to tradition, the regular flesh and the organs of the animal sacrificed to the deity must all be cooked together. All the organs such as liver, kidneys, lungs, heart and so on are strung together on a thread —this is called the suti-ruti. This string is added to the pot in which the regular meat is being cooked. This special sacred curry is called barbat. Some people stick the fashi (epiglottis) on the outside of the pot used to cook meat. Fashi would cook too early in the curry. Stuck somewhere on the top, outside, it cooks at the same pace as the meat within and acts as an indicator: when these pieces of fashi fall off, the meat in the pot is cooked.

When the meat is cooked, the string of suti-ruti is is taken out and mashed by hand. It is placed as naivedya (offering) for the deity and distributed to people as prasad (devotional offering shared with devotees). This prasad of suti-ruti is noteworthy as it is prepared in all the rituals of the Mang and Mahar communities, as well as many others.

According to the custom, the first pangat (row of seating for meals) is usually of married women and they are the first to receive the suti-ruti prasad. In some cases, custom gives virgin girls the honour of sitting in the first pangat.

Usually in all public meals and especially in religious, ritualistic feasts, salt is commonly referred to as ‘sweet’. Saying that the food is saltless or lacking enough salt may sound rude and insulting to the host. Or perhaps it may be assumed that whatever is served should be considered sweet. Or this custom could have emerged out of an extremely god-fearing belief that a religious or ritualistic meal cannot be criticized as it would amount to insulting the deity.

Khur-mundi (trotters and head)

Khur-mundi karane (to take on someone trotters and head) is a phrase often used to refer to one person ruthlessly battering up another. But khur-mundi is also a delicacy: it is a curry made of an animal’s head and trotters.

Some people followed a tradition of burying the khur-mundi instead, near the family deity temple. If this temple was too far then they followed a ‘shortcut’ ritual called pachpavli. They would go into a nearby forest and worship five stones with haldi-kunku and a ‘blouse piece’ (a short length of cloth) facing in the direction of their family deity’s temple. In case the head was buried or given to the priest or the patil (chief) of the village, this delicacy could not be prepared.

But in all other cases, khur-mundi is usually prepared on the second day of the sacred feast. The legs and heads are carefully shaved. Some people roast them over a flame and then peel or scrape the skin. Each of the methods give different flavours. The khur and mundi is then chopped into small pieces, boiled and made into a curry. For the recipe, refer to the one given under khur (trotters). The amount of brain obtained from the head is usually small and not enough for a large group. The recipe of preparing brain is already given. Tongue and jaws take time to cook. Because of all these reasons, khur-mundi is reserved for only core family members. One doesn’t need to make fresh masala for this as the leftover masala from the main festival day is usually used for this preparation.

Pekat (hindquarters)

‘I will kick your pekat’ is a commonly used phrase. Pekat refers to the hindquarters, that is, hind legs above the knees up to the waist. At times of holy sacrifice, if the number of eaters is small or if more than one animal is sacrificed, then the pekat of the goats or sheep is kept aside. Some people keep aside a part of the front legs as well, depending on how much is extra.

The guests would eat to their hearts’ content at such feasts but usually the host and their family would not get a chance to eat properly. In the bustle, the family members would get only a small portion of meat. Hence, they would wait for this reserved pekat. On the second or third day, when all the guests were gone, they would take out the pekat and make a curry out of it. The pekat had been kept hanging, out of reach of dogs and cats. This way it would stay well ventilated and dry up properly as well.

Pekat curry should be cooked like the usual meat curry. Ground masalas and spices are always made in excess in preparation of the feast days. They come in handy. It tastes more like fresh, partly dried chaanya than regular meat—it is mildly fermented.

Barbat ani pangat (festive curry and the rows of seating for feasts)

During sacred religious ceremonies, it was a tradition to sacrifice only one animal. Some people used to undertake a larger navas for the fulfilment of a big wish and sacrifice many animals on its fulfilment. The number of animals to be sacrificed also depended on the host’s reputation, wealth and number of invitees. One animal would be insufficient for a larger crowd consisting of relatives, dependents, servants, friends and villagers.

Barbat or special meat curry was usually prepared by men. Women from the neighbourhood would bring their own tavas to roast bhakris. In villages it is the norm to mash the bhakris in the curry. Bhakris of jowar and bajra absorb a lot of liquid. So, the quantity of curry needed was very great. Cooks would prepare a good amount of barbat to suffice all the invitees.

In villages, the kanduris (sacred feasts) were usually held in the evening. But if you went out of town to host your kanduri, then people were invited for lunch or dinner depending on mutual convenience. After offering the naivedya (food offering) to God, married women were honoured to sit in the first pangat. Pangat is a line or row of eaters who would sit together for meals. If it was decided to have only one pangat for all, then everyone was grouped to sit according to their caste.

In the case of a kanduri hosted by a rich person, clusters of castes would sit next to each other leaving a sufficient gap in between. The pangats would start right from the gate of the mansion and it would go inside the premises in several parallel rows or a single row. If the number of invitees was high, then more than one pangat would be arranged. This meant that one set of people would eat and after that the place would be cleaned and the second set would be seated and so on. The order of such pangats was according to caste. The lowest caste in the hierarchy would be served in the last pangat or made to sit the farthest within the same pangat. It was customary for the invitees to bring their own thalis or metal plates (with raised sides—like a round tray) from home. (Vegetarian meals would be served on disposable plates made from dried leaves. Such plates are flat and any watery gravy cannot be served on these). There was no system of bowls. Barbat gravy would also be served in the plates. And invariably it would flow and spread onto the entire plate. To avoid this mess, people would place a pebble or a wooden chip beneath an edge of the thali. This raised the plate from one side and all the watery gravy accumulated only on one side of the plate.

Meat pieces and gravy were served separately. Pieces of meat would be served only once in the beginning. There was no restriction on the number of servings of the watery gravy and bhakris. Meat pieces were kept in the raised part of the plate, the bhakri and gravy at the lower end. People would mash the bhakris in the gravy and eat this mixture known as kaala. Sometimes, small chunks of intestines or other meat would come along with the gravy that was served. Whoever got it were pleased and relished it, considering it a bonus. Barbat gravy, however, was made in such large quantities as to justify the phrase, ‘a small meat block and a pot full of stock’.

Very often, the gravy would be left over after serving everyone. The next day all the servants would be asked to take it home. Everyone would hurriedly bring their utensils to get their share. Very few meat pieces would remain in this leftover gravy; there might be a few crushed bones left in the bottom of the pot. Sometimes the gravy would have even fermented overnight. Jowar bhakri or kanya (jowar porridge) were cooked to eat along with this gravy. Some would cook jowar bhakri pieces in the barbat gravy. This preparation tasted delicious.

Chicken

Many people did not have the means to sacrifice a goat or a buffalo. But one must sacrifice animals for God. The practice of sacrificing a cockerel (male chicken) started mainly for this purpose and is common even today. Also on Mondays, Tuesdays, Fridays, new moon days, full moon days and such other auspicious days, male chickens are sacrificed for deities such as Mari-aai, Lakshmi-aai, Satvaai, Ranubai, Mhasoba and others. Hens that have become infertile are eaten but only a cockerel is used for sacrifice. Sacrificing female animals is rare. Male animal sacrifice is the norm everywhere. Perhaps females were spared from killing because of their reproductive ability. Moreover, one cockerel is enough to manage and fertilize a troupe of twenty hens. So other males are seen as expendable.

Hens get cranky and aggressive once their fertility period is over. They get depressed and irritated most of the time and make squeaky noises. Sometimes they attack other chickens and even small children. Desi chickens do not lay eggs every day. After all the eggs in their oviduct are laid, the hens mate again and start laying eggs again. They do not lay more than 150 eggs a year.

If a young hen stops laying eggs, women tickle its nose with one of its feathers, thinking that this superstitious act will make them fertile again. Sometimes the chickens got infected with lice. It itches if the lice in chickens’ feathers get on a human body.

Usually, an infertile hen is made to sit on the eggs. Once she sits on fifteen to twenty eggs, she starts developing love and warmth for the eggs. Such chickens come back after a bit of foraging and sit on the eggs

on their own. The chicks usually hatch after twenty days. In the old days, some people would keep the eggs of ducks or peahens found in the forest along with chickens' eggs for hatching. The chickens would take care of all these chicks as if they were her own babies. These duck and peacock chicks would follow their foster mother everywhere. It was quite an awe-inspiring sight. (Nowadays, since hunting is banned, such sights are rare.)

Hens were usually killed and eaten only after they became permanently infertile after three or four years. Often, if a slit female chicken had not become fully infertile as suspected, she would have a row of eggs in her oviduct—eggs of all sizes, from that of a pea to a mature egg with shell, reflecting the stages of development. This row was cooked in the same curry as the chicken. Women would regret it in such cases, thinking the hen could have been so much more useful had they not killed it.

Chickens and their chicks are smart enough to recognize their own house. In the evening, after a day of foraging, they return to their home without fail. They are kept in a specially made coop. Some people who cannot make such elaborate coops, keep them under a cane basket. Each hen has a fixed place to lay her eggs. Hens make a particular cackling noise when they are laying an egg. Their owners always understand this sign.

Sometimes a contagious disease can hit the entire flock. In such cases, out of desperation, the infected chickens would be killed and eaten. Because it was not advisable to eat the naturally dead chicken, they were deliberately killed before they died naturally. Under the wings of infected chickens, a thick finger-like boil appeared on the skin. It was called 'kata' meaning a thorn. People used many indigenous remedies to cure them. Some people would burn these thorns. Others put the chickens' own feathers in the chickens' noses. Some people mixed vekhand (a medicinal herb) in dough and fed this to the hens.

Occasionally the owner would give the chickens a special treat of spring onion, garlic greens, or soiled nuts and grains. They would make sounds such as ppa-ppa-ppa or a ti-ti-ti to call them. Even hens that had gone far away would come back hearing the voice of their owner. Chickens cackle loudly when they spot any of their natural enemies, such as the falcon, wild cat and mongoose. The owners would be warned by the cacophony and come running to protect their birds. Chickens eat all kinds of insects and grubs from faeces and dung, or those found elsewhere in ground or on plants. They also eat all kinds of grains and leftover food. Moreover, they kill small scorpions and small or medium-sized snakes and eat them. Therefore, the owners were protected from poisonous snakes automatically. Cats can be dealt with but the mongoose is quite dangerous for chickens. It attacks the birds, slits open their necks and drinks their blood.

Poultry is needed for various rituals. Eggs and various items, even a rooster, are offered at the Satvaai puja, which takes place in the open, often near the forest. When I was a youngster, my friends and I sensibly took charge of such eggs and discarded chicken heads, and cooked and ate them in the forest itself.

Exorcism is still practised today and usually a live chicken is part of the basket of offerings made to persuade the possessing spirit to leave its victim. This is left overnight at a designated spot. Sometimes, if the exorcist or a wandering cat or other animals don't eat it, the chicken is found back in its original coop along with its flock the next morning. Poultry farming by this class helped them cover a few side expenses beyond bare survival. Also, this way the children got to eat fresh eggs. The chicken, however, were kept for exclusively for sale and eating them was a rare privilege. They would be slaughtered for consumption only for special guests and if beef was not available.

All animals and birds, except pigs, were made to drink water before being killed. It was said that the animal could see the knife in this water. At times, blood was spilled on the idol of the family deity as a ritual.

Traditionally, people cut off the chicken's head and leave it to die. Some strong roosters keep on fluttering about for a long time even after being beheaded. The killed chicken has to be skinned as soon as possible. It's the same with animals. It is easier to skin the animals immediately after killing.

The chicken or any bird is cleaned mainly in one of these three ways:

1. The freshly slaughtered chicken's feathers are plucked by hand. Then the bird is briefly roasted over an open flame, so that the remaining small feathers and their roots under the skin are burnt. All the tiny insects on the body also get burnt in this process.

2. The chicken is dipped in boiling water and then it is plucked; the feathers come off easily.
3. The feet and wings of the chicken are cut off. The skin on the abdomen is cut laterally and the entire skin is peeled off, feathers and all. This method of skinning is the most popular.

After skinning, the gall bladder and stomach are retained but the intestines are thrown away. (Some communities eat the intestines too.) A chicken's gall bladder looks like a ripe neem seed and has to be removed carefully. It is said that if the bile spills out, all the meat becomes bitter. The stomach is cut with a knife and the undigested food and waste are taken out. Pebbles are also often found in the stomach. A chicken's testicles are inside the body, unlike animals. They are also eaten. Bird meat recipes are similar to animal meat recipes, except that bird meat cooks faster than animal meat. The breast is very popular amongst children because it is soft, juicy and easy to eat. Each of the three above methods of skinning chicken render a different taste to the curry.

Sometimes, a hen is killed, assuming her infertile, but eggs are found in her stomach. These eggs should be cooked along with regular curry. These eggs, boiled along with other meat and masalas, are delightfully tasty.

While wandering in the forest, if fresh eggs of doves, pigeon, quails, grey francolin, peahen or some other birds are found, the only means of cooking them there is to cover the eggs with dung or mud and put them in the embers of a campfire. They get perfectly cooked. When I was a youngster, the eggs that my friends and I 'rescued' from former puja sites were also cooked in the same way in the forest.

Ambura

This dish was eaten only by Mang households and that too only in the days after Pola.

'Pola' is a carnival for farmers who offer their gratitude to bulls and bullocks who help them in farming throughout the year. This one day, the bullocks are given a rest, bathed, worshipped and offered a feast. In the border area of Karnataka–Maharashtra, the same festival is celebrated as Bendur a month earlier.

In the Pola festival, gratitude was shown to Mangs along with bullocks. On the eve of Pola, the Mang family used to go to the house of their traditional masters to give nagarmotha. Nagarmotha or nut grass is a fragrant grass that grows near lakes and water bodies. This herb is used by women for the care and nourishment of hair along with shikakai and reetha. But during Pola, farmers used this herb to bathe bullocks. The extent to which this festival is observed by Mangs has reduced over time, though still practised in some pockets. There is now a new trend of worshipping tractors as well.

On the eve, tel-khichda was made for the oxen and bulls. It was not spicy. Jowar was soaked and then boiled with oil added. The same preparation was served to the Mangs as well. While the landlords were busy decorating the bullocks, Mangs were busy making garlands of mango leaves. These garlands were given to the landlords. In the evening, the chosen bull, the special guest of honour, passed through the village gate, with all the other decorated bulls and bullocks following him in the procession. Both were accorded the same status, and will be referred to as bulls here in describing this colourful festival.

Farmers decorated their animals according to their tastes. Someone put flowers on the horns, another adorned the horns with bright wool or cotton strings. Some people dipped their palms in colours and imprinted them upon the bodies of the bulls. Some used garlands and decorative plaques. Some draped beautiful rectangular cloths over the bulls' backs.

A few enthusiastic landlords hired nautch girls to dance in front of the bulls in this procession. Firecrackers were burst, which scared the bulls. Hence, many people cracked whips instead of bursting firecrackers. It was a great alternative to smaller firecrackers.

The bulls were brought to the open field in the courtyard. The cows were also brought there. Wedding ceremonies were performed between the bulls and the cows. Women worshipped the bulls and cows, and fed them puran polis. If the bull urinated during the puja, the farmers rejoiced as it meant that they could expect a good rainfall in the coming season. After this, everyone sat in a pangat for the feast. (Pangat means 'rows of meals'—*pankti bhojan* in Hindi—the traditional Indian system of seating people in rows on the floor and others of the community serving them food on a banana leaf or a plate.) After everyone was served, the

Mangs started the feast by shouting, ‘Changbhala [Let everything be blessed]!’ Others followed suit. Mangs and bullocks would serve their masters throughout the year without uttering a single word of resentment. This day was celebrated to acknowledge and respect their efforts. This tradition, though reduced, has not completely disappeared and is still followed in some villages.

On Pola, Mangs had to visit every household in the village they served, to partake of a meal. They had to eat at least five morsels at each house as a sign of respect. All other food was brought home. It usually consisted of puran poli, yelavanchi amti (spicy dal), rice, gulawani (a jaggery-based sweet dish), milk, sometimes even ghee and fried items such as kuravadya and bhaje (fritters of vegetables in besan batter). The next day too, more leftover food would be brought from the farmers’ homes. Mangs were faced with a peculiar problem of storing and using this large quantity of perishable food received from many houses.

A solution was found in the form of ambura. A large and old clay pot that had become non-porous over time was placed on a hollowed-out chool (stove). All kinds of extra food items like khichda, gulavani, puran poli, yelvanachi amti, etc., were stored in this as soon as they arrived. Underneath this vessel was a fire always burning at a very low flame. The mixture would be stirred every time any new food item was put in it. This was known as ambura. Ambura means fermented. The taste of this homogenous mixture was peculiar—slightly sour, slightly fermented. This ambura would last for a week or so. People would get a slight kick, like that of a light beer, after eating ambura. Children invariably fell asleep after eating it.

Mangs and bullocks

According to a legend, Basavanna, a three-horned bull with divine power, was overpowered and tamed by a Mang man. He uprooted the bull’s middle horn, made a rope from the roots of a palash tree, put it through his nose and engaged him in agricultural work. Traditionally the Mangs used to castrate bulls. They also shaped their hooves to shoe them. These shoes, thinner than horseshoes and oval in shape, helped the bullocks walk on the stony, rough roads without damaging their hooves, which were meant for soft muddy ground. Mangs also shaped bullocks’ horns. In addition, they used to do an important task of putting a rope through the bullocks’ noses. For this, they would make a hole in the thin septum between the two nostrils. Even if the rope is lightly pulled or strained, the bulls would stop immediately or move to the left or right as indicated. Besides, the Mangs would also weave mungshis or muzzles which were used to cover the bullocks’ mouths to prevent them from eating foodgrains or cobs while working in the farms. Such was the close connection between the Mangs and bullocks.

Leftover food

Traditionally Mahars and Mangs were closely engaged in one way or the other with the households of the landlords. Mahar watandar (another term for balutedar) households in the village would be well fed and content. Mang households also traditionally associated themselves with landlords. Cleaning cattle-sheds, cleaning the exteriors and surroundings of the house, repairing and applying cow-dung plaster to the outer walls before weddings or other functions, feeding lactating cows, buffaloes and their calves, cutting wood and cleaning any mess that happened around the house were some of the additional tasks that female and male members of both the castes did for their landlords.

Sometimes all the family members of a Mahar or Mang household used to serve in the landlords’ houses for one or the other task. They were not paid for such ‘minor’ work but they were given leftover food on a daily basis. Buttermilk was offered to them from time to time. Besides, they were offered sweets and savouries made on big festivals like Diwali. The leftovers of boondi (sweetened fried chickpea pearls), rice, puris, and the like, made during weddings and festivities, were given to them—these were dried and eaten for many days that followed. Usually only stale food was given to them. Sometimes it was blackened from having been stored in brass utensils.

When this leftover food was doled out into their pots, Mahar and Mang women would stir the contents of the utensil and smell the food. They would bow to the food and touch the utensil to their head to show their gratification despite its smelly state. Sometimes the curry turned slimy and was only fit to be thrown away,

but that happened only in exceptional situations. Usually, it was reheated repeatedly and eaten for as long as it lasted. Or the gravy was mixed with the jowar flour and bhakris were made of this mixture. Sometimes the women added pieces of dried bhakri in the gravy and boiled it. These were also the ways to deal with homemade curry if it turned stale.

All the contractual balutedari households of these two castes used to get leftover food every night from almost all the upper-caste houses in the village. It was their right. There was a popular saying that captured this pattern: 'Farmers get the seed, Mangs (or Mahars) the stale feed.'

Mahar and Mang houses were offered wheat, jowar, corns, pulses, peanuts, fruits, vegetables and anything that was grown in the farms on which they worked. If the farmers had a jaggery-maker, they were also offered the molasses, liquid jaggery and sugarcane. However, very rarely was a good-quality crop offered to them.

Seeing a married Mang woman's face first thing in the morning was considered auspicious by the upper castes. Hence married Mang women had to visit the landlords' houses early morning to do cleaning chores and also for special events in the family. But a widow was considered inauspicious. If there were only widows in a Mang household, then men would go.

On some festival days, at the time of worshipping a god in the field, the honour of starting the meal was given to Mangs. Phrases such as 'Mang will fulfil all your wishes', 'Mangs will make sure that you live a good life' were common in villages. However, cuss-words using the caste name were not uncommon either, such as: 'Let the Mang f**k your m****r'.

Cultural appropriation?

Nowadays, across many cities, there are signs and billboards advertising the sale of 'kanduri' and 'dhawara' mutton in street corner joints and highway dhabas. There are restaurants and eateries that serve vegetarian and non-vegetarian curries in black masala gravy.

Kanduri and dhawara are not mere recipes but traditions in themselves, with strong religious aspects. Every part of the animal is used in these preparations including parts not used in regular curries in restaurants or at home.

Are the hoteliers selling 'kanduri mutton' and 'dhawara mutton' every day to fulfil their sacred navas? Do they have traditional reasons such as a new harvest every day? Do they use all the organs in their curries? Only if they do this will the curry have the authentic taste of kanduri or dhawara. How can these be customized to cater to different customers who ask for less or more spicy, less or more watery?

Similarly, eateries offer 'kaaran meat curry'. Kaaran is a rare and occasional meat preparation. Nobody makes it for no reason or on a regular basis. Male buffaloes are killed to make this special curry on certain occasions. Kaaran is made by Mahars and Mangs in honour of Mari-aai or Lakshmi-aai or Mhasoba. Do these eateries really provide buff to their customers as a religious offering?

But the ignorant consumers couldn't care less.

6

Kaaran (sacrifice of a male buffalo)

Kaaran or kaayra means a ceremony to sacrifice a male buffalo and prepare a meat curry as a feast. Kaaran also means 'reason' in Marathi and as such, this kaaran was never done without good reason. In some villages, in the month of Ashadh, a kaaran was organized to protect the village from diseases for the year. In other villages, it was organized every year in the summer after the harvest on a certain date or one of the few dates in a certain month. While the kaaran was performed for religious and superstitious reasons, leisure and entertainment was the main driving force behind such kaaran feasts.

The month of Ashadh was considered sacred for kaaran. It used to rain heavily in this month. Most of the households of the Mahar and Mang castes suffered from a food shortage during this period. Besides, they lived in houses made of dried branches and mud, which stayed damp throughout the monsoon. Some people used metal sheets while others used crushed sugarcane husk or dried cobs to make a roof. A house that did not leak in the monsoon was an exception. The air was constantly smelly and humid.

There was no system to drain the sewage or carry it away from homes. Common places reserved to defecate outside the villages, common dustbins, small channels, rivers, lakes—everything in the village used to be over-flooded. Water bodies in villages often got polluted. This would cause epidemics of cholera and other diseases. It was believed to be a curse of Mari-aai, Lakshmi-aai or other goddesses. Under the guidance of the Potaraj artistes, people would come out with processions of these goddesses.

Potaraj is a troupe of male artists who perform religious songs, storytelling and puja. They have a peculiar colourful costume, long hair, a bag to store alms received and a whip with which they hit themselves as a part of the ritual. The Potaraj are often confused with the Kadaklakshmi community (also of Maharashtra), due to the similarity in their costumes and the self-flagellation, but the latter is a different community altogether. Potaraj and Pothuraju of southern India are also confused because of the similarity in titles but the latter is entirely different.

The carts in the procession were adorned with green bangles, haldi-kunku, neem leaves, coconuts, cloth, and so on, and dragged through the village and left outside the village bounds at the entrance of another village. It was symbolic of kicking the disease out of the village. Religious activities like this were considered necessary to get rid of the diseases which were believed to be caused by the fury of the goddesses.

The 'priesthood' of these religious work lay with the Potaraj artistes. Due to this religious activity involving large-scale meat preparation, the hunger of these two castes used to be satiated at least for a few days.

Although the upper castes contributed for this sacred undertaking and the arrangement of meals, they did not take a share of the holy prasad—they sponsored it because this kaaran was performed to also remove obstacles and calamities faced by the upper castes. Devi Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, would shower the upper castes with her blessings and Lakshmi-aai, the goddess of diseases, would make sure that her followers, that is, the lower castes, got a hearty meal at least for a few days.

Some of the key reasons for performing a kaaran are listed below:

1. Occasionally people from certain villages do it as a religious custom as described above.
2. For some this was a part of a navas. On fulfilment of their wishes, they would vow to organize a kaaran feast as a pay-off.

3. Childhood deaths were common. Some Dalit communities would pray to Mari-aai, Lakshmi-aai and Mhasoba for their children's lives. They would appeal to the gods, 'If we have a male child and if he survives, we will make him a Potaraj and devote him to your service.' All the ensuing children would be raised in a regular way but this one was marked out to become a Potaraj. His hair was never trimmed. A ritual of 'pat basavane' had to be performed and only then would he become a Potaraj. It was crucial to organize a kaaran for this ritual. During this ritual, he would be assigned a mentor in the form of a senior Potaraj and he would also get his own articles such as a rope whip, bag, ornaments and a costume. (However, except for this additional responsibility, a Potaraj was free to lead a normal life of working, marrying, having children and so on.)
4. It was done during the post-harvest leisure time. Consent of the upper-caste chief or head of the village, the patil, was sought. Without his support, a kaaran would not be possible. It was the patil or other rich farmers who could afford to offer their male buffaloes for this purpose.

The upper classes had little use for male buffaloes. Farmers using male buffaloes for their agricultural work were considered socially inferior. Usually, only bullocks were used on the farms of rich and respected farmers. There was disappointment if a male offspring was born to a buffalo. There was a saying, '*Bharavshachya mhashila tonga*', meaning the most trustworthy buffalo disappoints its owners by producing a male offspring when everyone is hoping for a female. This gender favouritism was evident. However, male buffaloes were not entirely useless. They were used to carry water in waterskins. They were also used in buffalo fights devised for rural entertainment.

Farmers used to offer their male buffaloes to the lower castes for sacrifice—sometimes happily, sometimes as an act of mercy or charity, sometimes to avoid conflicts and possible acts of revenge by disgruntled supplicants, and sometimes for a small price. Usually, this buffalo was very weak and malnourished.

Once procured, this male buffalo was released to wander in the village. There was a ceremony in the name of the goddesses to release its leash, which was performed with blessings from the Potaraj in the presence of prestigious people from the village. They would tie a sacred garland around the animal's neck and then it would be left to wander for a period ranging from six months to a year before the sacrifice. It was free to roam around and graze anywhere in anyone's farm. No one would stop it as it was a sacred animal belonging to the entire village now.

In a few months, it would turn into a strong and healthy animal—fit for the 'kaaran' ceremony. (A similar ritual is also performed by the Pardhi community who are nomadic hunters, but their rituals are quite different. They sacrifice more than one buffalo at a time.)

Kaaran is a ritualistic tradition of sacrificing a male buffalo. The male buffalo is supposed to be the traditional vehicle of the demons. Demons are depicted as harassing the Brahmins, always disturbing their meditations and yajnas. In order to protect the Brahmins from the demons, the gods have killed the chiefs of 'demon' tribes by taking different forms.

Those who were considered demons—the tribals—had domesticated the buffalo breed for about 6,000 years for use in daily farming work. Male buffaloes may have been used by them for their regular travel and transport. Since the original inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent were Dravidians and followed a different culture from Aryans, Dravidians and all things pertaining to them were labelled as abominable and loathsome and buffaloes were a part of it. Their domestic animals were perhaps labelled inferior and unholy.

Death, albeit an inevitable part of human life, was despised and so the gods were exempt from its unholy execution. It was easier and more convenient to reason and blame death on something which was outside the pious culture. Lord Yama, apparently a Dravidian, along with his vehicle, a male buffalo, may have thus been accepted as the god of death in the Vedic culture.

Just as cows became sacred in yajna culture, were buffaloes considered sacred in the culture of the Dravidians? The buffalo clan must have lost this battle in the aggressive propaganda of the yajna traditionalists. They may have been debarred and reviled. Remains of what was considered sacred by the people of the yajna culture can be found even in today's day-to-day customs and expressions. For instance, akhud-shingi (short-horned), bahududhi (giving a lot of milk), bahuguni (possessing several good traits) and

innocent are some of the virtuous adjectives describing cows, versus aggressive, unclean and ugly for buffaloes. ‘Like a docile cow’ and ‘like a contentious buffalo’ are commonly used to describe people.

Before the kaaran

Before the kaaran, the entire Mangwada (Mang settlement) was full of hustle and bustle, overflowing with enthusiasm for the forthcoming religious feast. A contract had already been given to a troupe of Potaraj performers that were famous in the area. If they were from the family, then an informal message was enough to engage them. Grand arrangements of boarding and lodging were made to accommodate the visiting Potaraj artistes. Their troupe included veterans as well as young novices who were under training.

Potters were asked to make kelya (mud vessels). Every woman (except widows and re-married women) from the village was supposed to carry these vessels on her head. Once painted, the kelya were known as rathya. Such rathyas (painted mud vessels) were filled with water, turmeric and kumkum and kept in the temple.

Farmers used to release male buffaloes that they did not need for farming. Such wandering buffaloes were traced and captured from nearby areas, brought to the settlement and tied up. Families who used to do this kaaran every year would buy the male buffaloes from the village farmers, mostly at a nominal price. Grains and other items were requested and brought from the farmers’ houses as a matter of right.

Sometimes the Potaraj and a local team of volunteers would go to the nearby villages and ask for aid in the name of God. Devotional songs about goddesses, songs describing the plight of a mother and her recently married daughter were sung by the artistes. They would also narrate lyrical mythological stories of Satyavan–Savitri, King Harishchandra-Taramati, Chiliya Bal, Lord Vishnu’s vishwarupdarshan, stories of cursed cows, Brahmins, Hassan–Hussein’s kurbani (martyrdom) and so on. The entire village would assemble to watch these performances. One of the main artistes would then place the goddess’s whip round the neck of a rich, prestigious man. This was an indication that the man would have to give money to the artistes.

On the day of the kaaran, the chosen male buffalo would be given a bath. People would paint their palms and put the colourful impressions of the palms on the buffalo’s body. In the meantime, a few Potaraj artistes would go to perform ‘jal puja’ (water worship). After worshipping the water of the stream or river flowing near the village, they used to tie a stone to a basket in the name of the goddesses Mari-aai and Lakshmi-aai and the god Mhasoba and hide it in the water. (These are the nirakar or shapeless gods and goddesses of an animistic religion. Most villages have just one temple that sits all three—Mari-aai, Lakshmi-aai and Mhasoba—who are often depicted through stones and rocks.) The procession from the temple would set off later in the day. Freshly bathed and crisply dressed married women (they were addressed as rathi or rathya) would carry medium-sized, painted mud pots on their heads. Some pots contained cooked food items such as masala rice, some had neem leaves and few others would flaunt lamps made of wheat dough. The procession was led by Potaraj artistes playing musical instruments in a very intense and aggressive tune, followed by the male buffalo(es), then the married women and everyone else following behind. This was the order of the participants in the procession.

It was a rule strictly observed that no one in the procession should wear black. This ritualist and highly dramatic procession would keep moving but sometimes, or rather most of the time, it would be halted by someone’s black magic. The women refused to move forward. One or more of the women would then be possessed by a spirit or a goddess. They would then go in a trance and start moving vigorously and yelling. The Potaraj would act to quell the evil spirits possessing them. Musical instruments would be played more loudly when the procession was halted. Cow urine was sprinkled with neem leaves on the women in a trance, in order to remove any obstacles and purify the ill effects of the black magic. Sour rice was thrown at them. Then the procession would resume and reach the destination—the water body where they had hidden the stone in a basket. Potaraj artists who had not come to worship water in the morning would dive into the water to search for the goddess hidden in the form of the stone in the basket. The rest of the people standing on the banks would watch this search excitedly. When the goddess was found, the musical instruments would reach a crescendo. Then the procession would return to the shrine of the goddess in the same way.

There the Potaraj artists would present the buffalo before the goddess and recite the ‘Dhuparati’ (a devotional song sung along with burning dhup—a kind of incense in the form of a stiff paste). Haldi-kunku and a lemon would be put on the buffalo’s neck. This lemon would be cut by the patil or head of the entire village. Next, a group of senior villagers would tie the buffalo’s feet with a thick rope and then bring him down. The phrase ‘bringing the animal down’ was used instead of saying ‘killed’. That was the norm. Villagers of all castes would huddle around the animal so that no outsiders would have any access to the animal. Then everyone would drench a piece of cloth or a rope in the fresh blood oozing out of the dying animal’s body. Care was taken to ensure that outsiders would not get even a drop of this blood. It was believed that the Lakshmi or wealth of the village goes out if even one of the blood-soaked cloths or ropes was moved out of the village. Villagers would take the blood-soaked cloths or ropes home and keep them tied up on the roof as a good omen.

The buffalo’s head was severed from his body and his right foreleg was cut off at the knee and placed in his mouth. (The same process was followed for goats in some places.) The head was kept facing the idol of the goddess. A lighted wheat-dough lamp was kept on the head. (This head, covered with haldi-kunku, was buried in front of the goddess the next day.)

After the ritual of sacrifice was performed, the carcass was taken into custody by men. It was the men’s responsibility to clean and cut the meat and make the special curry. Large utensils were used for cooking this meat, which amounted to about half a ton.

They would use various tricks for quick and smooth cooking. Some people would tie betel nuts in a piece of cloth and leave it in the boiling curry. Some people would leave raw papaya in the same way. It was believed that this would hasten the cooking process by softening the meat. While cooking the meat, they would estimate the number of eaters and accordingly increased the quantity of hot water that went in. When the meat was cooked, a lot of yesur was added to it, which would thicken and flavour the extra-large quantity of gravy always needed.

Women would take turns to roast bhakris from early in the morning. If rice was received from the farmers’ homes, then it was cooked as well. Otherwise jowar was cooked like a thick pudding. After the curry was ready, it was first offered to the deity. Then before anyone else, married women were served the feast. After this, everyone else sat in pangat style and relished the food. Devotees from many villages would eat at these feasts. There was a custom of shouting ‘changbhala’ (let everyone/everything be blessed) while eating. The pieces of buffalo meat in the kaaran were not finely chopped. They were kept a little larger and were known as ‘dak’ unlike other meat pieces which are known as ‘boti’ or ‘botya’.

The meat of the sacrificed buffalo was forbidden to the Potaraj artistes. For them, a special treat of chicken was organized. One of the senior artistes would go into a trance and in this state kill a chicken by biting its neck in a single brisk snap. This was then cooked and eaten by all the artistes as a holy meal.

The tradition of Mahars and Mangs of giving male buffaloes for sacrifice is gradually disappearing. The practice of giving children into service to the Potaraj is also dying out. Myths about kaaran, oral stories, folklore and the rituals in this tradition are passed down from one generation to another. They were supposed to be respected as original stories from the indigenous culture but these stories have not been given that status by the so-called literate upper-caste elite. If they had accepted these stories wholeheartedly, we would have known how myths of the pre-Vedic period originated and developed into the mythological literature of the post-Vedic era. Some of the folktales that connect to the tradition of kaaran are summarized below.

The story of Mari-aai: A folktale from Karnataka

A fair and handsome Mang boy studied the Vedas by hiding his caste. Not only did he learn them well but he also married a Brahmin girl named Maramma. Eventually she had children. When she found out that her husband was not a Brahmin but a Mang, Maramma set herself on fire along with him and their children. She went on to be worshipped as Mari-aai or Mari-mata.

The male buffalo that is sacrificed in front of her to soothe her torment is a symbol of her Mang husband who deceived her when he hid his real caste from her. The goat and the sheep that are sacrificed in front of

Mari-aai are her children. The right foreleg of the buffalo is cut off and is kept horizontally in the mouth of the sacrificed buffalo and its severed head is placed facing the idol of the goddess. The idea behind the right foreleg is that the Mang man used to hold the breast of Mariamma with his right hand, so it is cut off and put in his own mouth. (This folktale in Kannada is given by S.L. Bhairappa in his novel *Ja Olandoon* translated into Marathi by Uma Kulkarni.)

The curse of Mari-aai and Lakshmi-aai

A Mang man who had mastered Vedavidya had two wives. Surprisingly, both were Brahmin. They were Mari-aai and Lakshmi-aai. Once it so happened that his mother came looking for him. She found him and started living in his house. One day, she felt like eating meat and expressed her desire to her son. Both her daughters-in-law realized the secret of their husband's caste. So, both of them committed suicide by jumping into the well. The curse of both of them fell on that scholar Mang. Because of their integrity and virtue, and because they were Brahmins, they became goddesses for the Mang community. And the scholar Mang turned into a male buffalo. Therefore, it is sacrificed in the kaaran, a symbol of the scholar who deceived two Brahmin women. (Maharashtrian folklore. There is also another legend which says that Sant Dnyaneshwar made a male buffalo recite the Vedas. Is it connected to this? Maybe!)

The sorrows of Nagayali: A folktale from Tamil Nadu

There was a monk named Piruha and he had a wife named Nagayali. Being the wife of the sage, she was, of course, a virtuous lady. The fame of her chastity spread all over the world. One day Lord Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh disguised themselves and came to her door to ask for alms to test her virtue. They made a bizarre request to her, saying, 'We don't want money, just give us food, and serve it without wearing a single garment on your body.' The strength of her virtue was so great that she recognized the three gods. She prepared the meal and transformed the three of them into infants by the power of her chastity. The three gods were so angry with her trick that they cursed her saying, 'You will become ugly.' She got infected with the 'devi' disease (smallpox), a viral infection causing deep eruptions on her face and body.

When her husband returned home, he was disgusted by Nagayali's appearance. He kicked her out of the house and cursed her, saying, 'You will become a demon, and will continue to haunt and make people sick and ugly with the same disease.' Nagayali is thus the goddess Mari-aai meaning goddess of devi, the deadly disease. Her devout devotee is the Potaraj who intercedes with her for the villagers.

Mari-aai and the Chandal man: A folktale from Maharashtra

There was a beautiful young girl who was (obviously) Brahmin. A young Chandal (equivalent of Mang in eastern and northern India) man fell in love with her, but he knew that she would not be attracted to him. The Chandal man went to Kashi and learnt Brahmin mannerisms and Vedas, hiding his caste and disguising himself as a Brahmin man. When he returned from Kashi, he was a completely changed, learned man. Neither the girl nor anyone else recognized him. He put forward a marriage proposal to which she agreed. Eventually they got married and had children. They were content and joyous as a family. But later, somehow, she realized that her husband was not a Brahmin but a Chandal. She got very angry. She cursed self and him. Because of that curse, she died and became Mari-aai, he became a buffalo and their children turned into goats and chickens.

Mariamma and the neem tree: A folktale from Tamil Nadu

Mariamma was the wife of the Tamil poet Thiruvalluvar. Thiruvalluvar was a Pariah by caste. Pariah or Paraiyar is considered to be the equivalent of the Mang caste in Tamil Nadu). Once, she got infected with the devi disease. She used to go begging from door to door. Due to the wounds and eruptions, flies would buzz around her and sit on her wounds. She used to carry the leafy twigs of the neem tree to drive them away. Also, she wore the neem leaves around her waist. Later on, Mariamma became the goddess who cured the

same disease. Moreover, because of her constant use of neem leaves, the tree gained importance and became a significant part in all forms of worship of the goddess Mariamma. Not only that, but people started using neem twigs and leaves to keep the flies away from meat and other food. Later, neem twigs were also used to cover dead bodies.

Mariamma and Yellama's story: A folktale from Tamil Nadu

Renuka was the wife of the powerful sage Jamadagni, and mother of five sons, including Parashurama, the sixth avatar of Vishnu. Her wifely devotion and chastity gave her the power to make a new pot out of river sand every day to carry water to her husband. One day, when at the river, she saw a Gandharva and was attracted by his beauty. It was enough to take away her pot-making power. Jamadagni was furious and ordered his sons to behead their mother. Parashurama took her to the forest and prepared to chop off her head. Hearing her screams, a Mang (Pariah) woman rushed to her rescue. She protected Renuka by shielding her with her own body. Parashurama's blow cut off both their heads.

Jamadagni was pleased with the boy's action and asked him to wish for a boon. Parashurama asked for them to be brought back to life. Jamadagni promptly complied, but in the hurry, their heads got interchanged. The Mang woman's head was attached to Renuka's torso and Renuka's head was attached to the Mang woman's body. Then Renuka became Mariamma and the Mang woman became Yellamma (*Bhartiya Sanskriti Kosh* by Leeladhar Sharma, 7:86).

1. According to the Mahabharata (*Van-parva,* 116, and Bhagwat, 9:6), Renuka was the daughter of King Prasenjit. The sage Jamadagni asked for her hand. So, the princess became the wife of an ascetic and started living in an ashram. She had five sons from Jamadagni. The youngest of them was Parashurama. Once, Renuka went for a bath in the river. She was mesmerized by the sight of a celestial king named Chitrarath sporting in the water in the river. As soon as Jamadagni found out about this mental adultery, he ordered his sons to chop her head off. The first four sons refused. Jamadagni cursed them and turned them into antelopes. Finally, Parashurama obeyed his father. Pleased by this, Jamadagni asked him to ask for a boon. Parashurama asked Jamadagni to revive his mother.
2. There was no caste discrimination amongst the sages at that time. If a person of any caste became ascetic, he was respected by the entire society.

Upper-caste rituals to calm epidemics

1. According to lexicographer Madhav Narayan Acharya, Dnyaneshwar says that Mahamari (Mari-aai, Mariamma) is a fierce rural deity. It is believed that she has the power to spread epidemics like cholera, devi (smallpox) and chicken pox. Goats and chickens are sacrificed in order to placate her.
2. In ancient times, it was believed that the king's sins caused epidemics. So, this ritual was performed to calm down the epidemic. Just as the Potaraj used to perform rituals to prevent diseases, the upper-caste society would have performed the Mahamari-shaman. The deities like Nrusinha, Rudra, Bhairav and Durga are important in the worship and honouring of this vow (*Bhartiya Sanskriti Kosh*, 7:186).

7

Other meats

Tandya/gunya/gunna/gunnya (pigs or desi pigs)

In some places Mang people referred to pigs as khalmanya (one whose neck points downwards). Mangs are not forbidden from eating pigs but horse consumption is strictly prohibited. The Mahars, however, hated pigs and pork. According to a tradition passed on orally, it was specified that Mangs should not eat horse meat. Since ancient times, the Mangs were appointed as servants in horse stables. This restriction may have been due to their close association with horses since then. It is possible that in some period horse meat was consumed in India. (Donkey meat is still eaten in some parts of India.)

The pig-raising tribes were usually outside the bounds of formal society, nomadic and involved in construction work, entertainment, basket-weaving or other such jobs regarded as low-level and inferior. Pig-rearing is the cheapest animal husbandry. There were people who would collect pig dung, dry it and sell it as fertilizer. Owners would have a flock of two to four females and a male pig. They would clip the pigs' ears as a way to identify them and leave them to roam around. This was also a sign to let everyone know that these were domesticated animals owned by someone. If there were many people owning pigs in the same locality, then they would each snip the ears of their pigs in a different style so as to easily identify their own animals.

The number of pigs goes on increasing as the female produces two litters per year with eight to ten piglets each time. Piglets are caught and their tails are chopped off like onion greens. Sometimes some people left the tails uncut. Cutting a dog's tail is called 'docking'. What would be the word for cutting off pigs' tails? Also, the gender of these piglets was examined. If there were more male piglets, then a few would be castrated. The testicle bag was given a slight cut and pressed. Both the balls would pop out and fall off. Then they would fill the cavity with mud and release the piglets.

The pig is supposed to be the third avatar of the famous ten avatars of Lord Vishnu. There is a myth according to Hinduism in the villages that eating the flesh of this third incarnation protects one from being possessed by ghosts. Some people used to tie a large canine tooth of a pig around their necks in a chain like a pendant. There is also a strong belief that pork makes men's 'waist' strong—in other words, improves virility. This meat is not forbidden to Kshatriyas. Its oil is also said to be an elixir for joint pain. If you put its oil (fat) on a flat stone in the night, it travels to the lower side by morning. Many such perceptions still exist in society. Although officially only Mangs eat pork, it is not considered taboo for men from other castes.

Mang people would buy a tandya (a large male pig) collectively or, if it was owned by one of them, would pay a part price and become part owners of that pig. A mature male pig's flesh is known as gunna in some places. It is not easy to catch a free, wandering pig. A forked stick, such as the one carried by Gandhiji during the Salt March in the film *Gandhi*, has to be tied with a rope made into a noose. The pig runs and wanders throughout the village. If a particular male pig needs to be trapped it is easier to corner it in the narrow alleys. Once captured, the pig starts screeching, in anticipation of its impending death. To stop this, its mouth is tied after tying its feet.

The pig doesn't have a flexible neck so it can't turn its head around and look back. Nor can its head be pulled up to cut its throat. It therefore cannot be killed in a 'halal' way—that is, one cannot sever its neck and let the blood flush out. Pigs don't die so easily. One has to guess where its neck is and keep hitting it with an axe repeatedly.

Slowly the screams would die off. The dead animal would be put on a bonfire for roasting. The fire would ensure that along with the hair and dust, all the parasites and insects on the skin, such as lice, ticks, mange, etc., would die. The pig becomes stiff as it starts getting roasted. Then with the help of sharp stones they would rub the body vigorously and clean it using lots of water. It would start looking yellow as the dirt and dust would come off. After all these efforts, the pig would become pure and immaculate. An expert surgeon (butcher) would give a sharp vertical cut from the mouth till the anus through the stomach, exactly in the centre, dividing the body in two equal halves. He would make sure that no organs, especially the delicate ones, were damaged while doing so. Then all the organs in the abdomen would be taken out carefully. If the intestines burst inside, there was a chance of all the meat getting spoilt. The fat layers would be sliced in big chunks as if one were slicing a big round fleshy pumpkin. This thick fatty skin was already roasted from outside. It was enjoyable and gratifying to eat these like slices of tender coconut. So delicious it was! These fat chunks could also be stored as chaanya. There was a lot of oil in it. Pig fat doesn't appear to be much but in fact there is a lot of it. A thick and exquisite layer of this oil is formed on the prepared curry. The recipe for pork curry is similar to that of mutton. Some people used to eat pork only because it was supposed to ward off ghosts.

Cooking tip: Cook pork like a mutton curry.

Moholachi poli (honeycomb)

Large wild bees are extremely aggressive. Their hive is known as agyamohol. Agya means fiery and mohol means hive. No one would usually dare to touch these hives as the bee attacks are brutal and stings acutely agonizing. But people would eat the hives of smaller bees. There are two main types of smaller bees: lavangi (fiery like clove) and kagadi (thin like paper). Lavangi bees look slightly reddish. They make their hives in the open. These bees are aggressive too and sting the attackers. That's why people cover their faces and create smoke to chase off the bees before touching these hives. Kagadi bees are darker but otherwise look like lavangi bees. They are not as aggressive and so they build their hives in comparatively inaccessible locations. These bees fly away even with the smoke of regular bidis and cigarettes. There was a delicacy made from the hives of both these types of bees.

One can easily spot the three sections of the hive. A puffed-up pod attached to the branch or an external object, which stores honey, the next part below it contains eggs and larvae and the last part is work in progress. The bigger the pod, the more the honey. The first part is used for extracting honey, the second part is used as a delicacy and the third part would be given to dogs. It was said that the dogs went a bit bonkers after eating it.

Recipe

Ingredients

1. Honeycomb containing larvae and eggs
2. Oil or fat
3. Onions, chopped
4. Red chilli powder
5. Salt

Method

1. Cut the honeycomb into small pieces.
2. Heat a little oil in a pan and fry onions till brown.
3. Add chilli powder and salt, mix.
4. Add the honeycomb pieces, sauté a little. Cover and reduce heat to low.

5. Let it cook for a while. Serve.

This honeycomb preparation tastes perfect with jowar bhakri. It is tasty and nutritious. It should be eaten hot, as it is high in wax and protein. It gets stuck in the mouth if eaten cold, just like animal fat. This dish has a distinct ‘hot ’n sweet’ taste.

Byproduct: wax

People would suck the honey out of the comb and spit out the waxy parts. Then they would collect these remnants from all the eaters and put it in a pot. Adding a little turmeric, the pot was set over a fire. In the meantime, a large deep plate was filled with water. The mixture in the pot would melt and liquify and all the lumps would dissolve. A piece of thin cloth was then stretched over the plate with water, the hot liquid was poured over the cloth and strained through it. As it entered the water, it would set solid, transformed into pure wax. This was then stored in suitable containers.

In olden times, women used to apply this wax on their foreheads before applying kumkum as a bindi so that it would stick properly. They would spend some time looking into the mirror and shaping a perfectly round spot with the help of the folded corner of a thin cloth. Such a bindi would stay longer. The wax ensured that they didn’t sweat in that part, so the bindi did not smear or smudge. Sometimes they had to buy the wax from the market. Such wax, of poor quality, would itch and burn their skin. They would murmur, ‘Looks like this shitty wax is from a fiery agyamohol.’ That’s why they preferred to make their own wax at home. In the last few years, readymade (ready to stick) bindis have become commonly available in the market. They use artificial gum and colour and are available in all colours, shapes and sizes. The process of applying wax and red kumkum has thus lost its significance.

Fish

These two castes from Marathwada did not fancy fish. However, some people would go to the stream or river near their village to catch fish in their spare time. Fishing was not popular probably because one cannot predict the time needed to catch fish or the size of the catch, if any. There is no guarantee whatsoever.

As a leisure activity, men would take woven nets, indie (a longer net), old dhotis, saris and so on to the pond. During the very first flood of the season, the fish are perhaps not able to see clearly in the muddy water. They pop their heads out while swimming upstream against the current. This was the perfect time for fishing. People would hit them with a stick or grab them with an old dhoti or a similar cloth.

In winter, rivers and streams would calm down. The water in the river was crystal clear and reasonably still. By then the number of fish would have risen. People would catch various fishes and their babies by hand, digging in the water pits, in the mud, on the rocks and in between the gaps. There were many kinds of fish, with their own names and characteristics. There were the maral, the bewhiskered katarane, the tepalya, the malge and the chambhari that was very delicious but full of fine bones. Then there was vambti or vambat (Indian spiny eel), a long snake-like fish that was armed with barbs, and would attack and hurt the people catching them.

In the summer, the water would recede, the river would break up into narrow streams and pools, and there were ditches everywhere. It was easier to just empty water from a ditch with buckets and catch all the fish in it. In such cases, a lot of small babies were found, which were known as chingalya. Sometimes someone would mix a moderately poisonous substance in the ditch, which reduced the oxygen level in the water. The fish would become unconscious and float on the surface, and were easily collected. Sometimes turtles were found along with the fish, which were also eaten. Crabs were caught from their hidey-holes. Sometimes shrimp were also found in lakes.

If the catch was limited, it used to be roasted there itself on a fire made with the driftwood on the shore that had come with the flood waters. If the crab was big, its hollow shell was taken home. It was believed that if it was used as a lamp, house bugs would be chased away when it was lighted. Often in the sand of the river basin one can find live shellfish. They were not killed because no one ate them in this region. Medium-sized

or large empty shells were taken home. These shells were used to feed milk to babies or to feed milk or Ganga water to people on their deathbeds.

Almost all freshwater fish have scales. In the case of larger fish, their scales were removed with a knife, vili or a sharp stone. Medium-sized and small fish were rubbed on the rough stones to scrape off the scales. Some people used thick gram flour as a scrubber to clean small fish. The bellies of the fish were opened and the intestines were removed, as were the fins most of the time. Usually, the catch was hidden from everyone's view to protect it from the 'evil gaze' of envious onlookers, which, it was believed, would turn the fish bitter.

Recipes

Fish

Ingredients

1. Fish, cleaned and cut in large pieces
2. Turmeric
3. Salt
4. Red chilli or yesur
5. Coriander
6. Ginger-garlic paste, if available
7. Oil

Method

1. Mix all the ingredients except oil to marinate the fish pieces. Leave for half an hour.
2. Heat oil in a pan over medium-high heat.
3. Add the marinated fish and marinade, mix well.
4. Add water based on the number of mouths to be fed in the house. Cook.
5. The fish is ready as soon as the water boils. Take off the fire and serve.

Fish is the only non-vegetarian dish that cooks very quickly. Unsurprisingly, there was no concept of frying fish in oil, as the expensive fats and oils were used sparingly.

Chinglya (small fish)

Since these are as tiny as your little finger, they do not need elaborate cleaning and removal of intestines, etc. Some chinglya are alive almost till they are put in the pan.

Ingredients

1. Chinglya
2. Turmeric
3. Salt
4. Red chilli or yesur
5. Coriander
6. Ginger-garlic paste, if available
7. Oil

Method

1. Marinate chinglya in the spices and salt. Leave for a few minutes.
2. Heat oil in pan, add the marinated chinglya with marinade. Mix and sauté.

3. Add very little water, enough to make a thick gravy.
4. Take off the fire as soon as the gravy comes to a boil. Serve.

Fish eggs

Ingredients

1. Oil
2. Onions, chopped
3. Fish eggs
4. Red chilli powder or yesur or coarsely chopped green chillies
5. Salt

Method

1. Put oil in a frying pan.
2. Add onions to the hot oil. When the onions turn golden-brown, add the fish eggs.
3. Add chilli powder or yesur or green chillies, and salt.
4. Keep stirring on low flame. Cook for for a few minutes and serve.

Crab soup

Ingredients

1. Crab
2. Red chilli powder
3. Garlic
4. Salt

Method

1. Clean the crab and crush the shell.
2. Place crab pieces in ukhal and pound it without adding any water.
3. Put this pounded crab in a cloth or a strainer and extract the juices.
4. Add water as needed.
5. Heat oil in a pan, add chilli powder, crushed garlic and other spices if available, and salt.
6. Add the crab juice and water mixture, and boil. Serve.

This hot soup tasted delicious. People suffering from cold, cough, bodyache and fever would especially be served this soup. Crabs were hard to come by in this region, so usually if someone caught any, they preferred to roast it at the riverside and eat it there itself.

Other non-vegetarian diet

Apart from the above-mentioned regular consumption pattern, occasionally meat of certain other animals and birds was also eaten. This meat was prepared using the same recipes. People would set out to hunt rabbits and ghorpads (monitor lizards) at the onset of monsoon. This tiny army would consist of seven to eight people accompanied by a couple of dogs and was armed with a rabbit trap. If it had just rained, an experienced person in the group would track the rabbit following its footprints. As the footprints became clearer, the group fell silent. The trap would be put up over a slope. Shouting and callings would begin. The frightened rabbit would run towards an open space and get trapped in the net. The hunters would keep a cautious distance from the rabbit: it is believed that the caught rabbit blows air into its hunter’s eyes, making the

latter's eyesight turn weaker day by day. Rabbit meat is darkish red and delicate. If it was a female, one would invariably find a foetus inside her. It was not a surprise. Rabbits are ready for mating immediately after giving birth to the previous litter. A cycle of seven to eight babies every two to three months is common.

On such hunting trips, sometimes sun-bathing monitor lizards were found on the hilltops. Rainwater seepages in their burrows forced them to come out to rest and keep warm. They would run into the burrows immediately and the hunters would dig them out. One was very careful while catching them as it was believed that if the monitor lizard hit someone with the tail, the person ceases to be a 'man'. Effeminate men would be taunted with remarks like, 'It seems this guy has been hit by a ghorpad's tail!' The monitor lizard's meat tastes like chicken. There is layer of green oil on the curry when it's cooked. The skinning of a monitor lizard was also done by an expert. Its hide was in great demand by makers of musical instruments. This was because the skin stayed tight and did not catch fungus easily. The sound of those instruments would be organically set on a higher scale. Monitor lizard's skin is easy to recognize. It is marked with small dark rectangles and squares.

Apart from this, occasionally eggs of pigeons, quails, ducks and peahens would be eaten if found. Similarly, doves, spotted doves (with a black necklace-like design around their necks), pigeons, ducks, waterfowls, migratory birds, hornbills and large migratory birds that primarily resided in safflower farms, etc., were also hunted.

Since this region is quite far from the sea, saltwater fish are not used in their diet. But the tradition of drying saltwater fish and selling them in faraway places is quite old. Their weekly markets are engulfed with the peculiar smell of dried fish. And these people love the dried variety of shrimps, small prawns, peeled large prawns and Bombay duck. They would fry all varieties of dried prawns by adding onion, masur dal (red lentils), turmeric, salt, coriander and either red chillies, green chilli paste or yesur. Sometimes they used to cut the dried Bombay duck into pieces and roast them, and make a thick gravy like that of the gravy of chaanya.

Haade or hadka (bones)

Not a scrap of an animal was wasted. If it could not be eaten or used in the community, it was sold, as were the bones of scavenged animals. Occasionally buyers of animal bones would visit settlements of these castes. There were discussions and speculation amongst these castes that these buyers made saras (a glue used in book binding) and cups and saucers from these bones. When the glue made from bones was cooked with water for use, it emitted a similar but much stronger odour than that of horns burning.

Shingat (horn of a dead animal)

Shingat is the horn of a dead cow, bullock or buffalo. It had its uses, too. If a snake went into someone's house, they would burn a shingat. This was a 'remedy from grandmother's purse' (a phrase used for all undocumented tricks of wisdom and medicinal know-how passed on down the generations, ucually through old women). Burning a horn would emit a strong and pungent odour which was similar to burning hair. (Biologically, horns are composed of hair.) Since it was believed that snakes were 'Brahmin', they would flee from this smell. This peculiar smell emitted from a particular house told the neighbours about the presence of a snake in that house.

The prosperous and well-off upper-caste farmers had various ways to store their surplus grains, such as kanagi (bins), balad (a dark room) and pev (underground storage). Pevs were so huge that several quintals of grain could be stored in it. When the grains stored everywhere else were finished, they would use what was stored in the pevs as a last resort. '*Pev futaney*' (the store has burst open) is a famous phrase in Marathi which means sudden abundance. After opening the pev, a lighted lantern was kept in it. Only if it stayed lit did the servants descend into the pev. If the lantern snuffed out, it meant that there was not enough oxygen and they would die if they stepped in.

When compared to this abundance, how much would be the surplus harvest for these two castes? Certainly not more than what would fit into the hollow horn of a dead animal. If someone had a harvest in their small farms, when asked about it they would refer to it as ‘shingatat pev’. That is, ‘Our harvest is so little that it fits into a shingat—but that’s like a pev for us.’

Phrases such as ‘*Deed dana an Mang/Mahar utana*’ were popular too, which meant the man belonging to these castes would lie down flat if you offered him one-and-a-half grains of food.

There was pain underlying their sayings, but the speaker and listener would both break into laughter. Although the Mangs and Mahars lived in extreme poverty, they were also adept at finding humour in their own situation.

Addictions

It was assumed for men in rural societies to have one or the other addiction. This was because of the belief passed on from the old and wise that ‘there is no entry in heaven if a man is without a vice’.

Alcohol

In these two castes, drinking alcohol was never forbidden. Nonetheless, it was a luxury. Besides, if you were branded as an alcoholic, no one would employ you on an annual labour contract. That’s why alcohol consumption was done only on certain occasions, i.e., on days of weekly markets or if there was special meat cooked at home. In the code language of Mangs, alcohol is called ‘Gyani’ meaning ‘wise’. A moron is also known as ‘gyani’ sarcastically. A wise man loses his mind after drinking alcohol. That must be the real reason why it is called ‘gyani’. Women, however, hated men who drank. When the husband came home drunk, women would start whispering, ‘Here he comes drinking that smelly piss.’ Most drunken men used to be quiet and mild when sober but after drinking they would become boorish and would abuse and beat up their wives.

The distillation process was called bhatti lavane meaning ‘putting up a furnace’ and the distilled liquor was called hatbhatti meaning ‘of hand furnace’. It was obtained from molasses or spoilt black jaggery. This spoilt jaggery was used exclusively for making alcohol. The jaggery was fermented and after adding navsagar (ammonium chloride) it turned into a stronger chemical. Then, this mixture would be sublimated. From one kilogram of jaggery, usually two and a half to around three litres of pure liquor would be extracted. This liquor was sold by the measure of a tambya (a mug) or loose in smaller measures like achcher, navtak, etc. Before taking the first sip, people would sprinkle a few drops with the right index finger in the memory of all the dead souls, and then simply gulp it down bottoms up by uttering ‘Ram Ram’. In order to improve the spoilt taste in the mouth, a salt crystal kept purposefully in a bowl would be sucked on. Alcohol would usually be served in local drinkery in cups with broken handles. Only one cup per group was given so the group invariably would share it amongst themselves. This was also a way of showing affection and solidarity. Casteism and untouchability were forgotten during such merry-makings.

Some people would take contracts of Shindi (palm) trees. There were people who drank alcohol made from palm trees. In Marathwada, this alcohol was available mainly in areas where clusters of palm trees were found. It was sold per bottle or a large mug. This alcohol looked like buttermilk but it tasted like alum, having a bitter and astringent taste. Mang people used to make brooms from these trees. The non-alcoholic, nutritious drink nira’, made from palm trees was not so popular.

Marijuana

Many people were addicted to marijuana. Chain-smokers would smoke it by themselves. That too before meals. Their eyes were always red and tired. Occasional smokers, however, smoked it passionately, with due respect to all its rules and rituals. They would buy it only occasionally. Some people would plant a couple of marijuana seeds in sugarcane fields, near dams or in ‘pot-kharab’ land. (Land near river or stream that is

damaged by floods and rendered infertile. Pot kharab literally means ‘stomach upset’.) There were no legal issues about trees planted on such lands.

Marijuana extract would be collected from the flowers. This would be rubbed after sprinkling some water. In the meantime, the cylindrical chillum was cleaned. Experts would put a small pebble in the chillum and stuff the crushed marijuana into it. This pebble would act as a filter. Then they would take a small, wet piece of cloth to screen the end, which acted as a second filter. Veterans would hold the chillum between the thumb and index finger, put it in the mouth and tilt the head towards the sky at ninety degrees. Someone else would make a knot of coconut husk, press it on the crushed drug and light it. Then the smoker would pulsate his cheeks like harmonium bellows and exhale the smoke from both the corners of his lips. Then they would pass this around and take turns to smoke this. They would keep reciting ‘Ram Ram’ till the marijuana lasted. Some would put the ashes of marijuana on their foreheads as if it were holy ash. It is believed that smoking marijuana doubles the appetite.

Eating tobacco by using it like a tooth powder (masheri) was done mostly by women, but other vices such as eating tobacco, bidis, betel leaves, snorting, etc., were done by men as well.

8

Vegetarian food

Apart from the occasional meat consumption, Mangs and Mahars would rarely get to relish non-vegetarian dishes. It can therefore be observed that many vegetarian recipes have also been developed by women from these two castes. In fact, the number of vegetarian dishes outnumber their non-vegetarian dishes. In the agrarian culture of the village, almost all the components of the daily diet of the class whose lives and livelihood were related to agriculture were local. The style of cooking and preparation depended on the ease of availability of ingredients from season to season.

Dals (pulses)

Pulses were a vital component in their meals. They used toor dal (pigeon pea), mung dal (green or yellow lentils), chana dal (gram) as a primary source, followed by masur (red lentils), urad (black gram), matki (moth bean), chavli (black-eyed pea) and watane (green peas). In addition, whole toor, mung, gram, moth bean, red lentils, kidney beans in their original legume form were also used for curries to be eaten along with bhakri. Horse beans, however, were only used either whole or in the form of ground flour and never as pulses.

The process of making pulses out of legumes

The legume seeds would be soaked in water. Depending on the thickness of their cover, some legumes would absorb more water and some less. Once they fully swelled up, the excess water would be drained out and the legumes would be spread out on a cloth for drying. When it was crisp and dry, it was put in a large circular stone grinder specially meant for making dals. The speed, however, was faster than the speed used for making flour. Then the resultant material was winnowed and later sieved using a large or medium sieve. This process would separate the good dal (pulses), daalga (bigger pieces of broken pulses), kalana (smaller powdery pieces), konda (bran) and folpat (skin/waste). Each type of pulse has its distinct and unique taste. Daalga tastes like dal. Kalana is often used for making pithla—a thick curry—or mixed with jowar flour to make bhakri. Konda was used to make papadya (small papadum made out of soaked bran mixed with spices). Folpat was used as animal feed and also used to mix in the cow dung cakes as fuel.

Types of pulse-based curries

Recipe

Ingredients

1. Toor or masur or mung dal
2. Salt
3. Onions, chopped
4. Red chilli powder or crushed green chillies
5. Garlic cloves, crushed

6. Turmeric powder
7. Coriander leaves
8. Jowar flour
9. Peanuts, crushed

Method

1. Cook dal in water with salt. Add chopped onion while cooking, if desired.
2. When it is done (the dal is easily crushed to a paste when gently squeezed between finger and thumb), add the other ingredients. You can skip whatever is not available out of this list, except salt and chillies.
3. Depending on the number of eaters, add hot water.
4. Mix this curry with bhakri, mash by hand, and serve.

Pithla

It is a delicacy made using dal flour. A thin or thick paste is made by adding water, and this mixture is boiled with spices. Although it can be made using any dal, the most popular is chana dal (gram dal). The word 'pithla' refers to this dal, unless otherwise stated. The flour made of this dal is known as besan. Some people also refer to pithla as besan.

Essential ingredients

1. Water
2. Red chilli powder or green chillies
3. Salt
4. Chana dal flour

If available (optional)

1. Garlic cloves
2. Onion, chopped
3. Cumin seeds
4. Mustard seeds
5. Coriander leaves
6. Turmeric powder
7. Oil
8. Garlic greens or onion greens

Recipe 1

Method

1. Put sufficient water in a pot, depending on the number of eaters, and put it on high heat. When the water boils, add salt and red chilli powder.
2. Reduce heat to medium. Hold a spatula in one hand to stir the pot. Sprinkle the flour with your other hand slowly, simultaneously stirring the mixture. This action ensures no lumps are formed and the flour mixes evenly. Keep breaking up any lumps to ensure a smooth mixture.
3. Allow it to boil for five minutes. Put a lid on the pot, else the popping hot bubbles may burn your skin.

4. The other ingredients (1–8) are optional and added later; the taste is different in each of these ways.

Recipe 2

1. Heat oil. Temper with mustard seeds and cumin seeds.
2. Add chopped onion to this, fry a little and then continue according to Recipe 1, by adding water, salt, chillies and going on as before.
3. The other optional ingredients can be added either initially or later.

Recipe 3

1. Bring the water to a boil.
2. In a separate bowl, mix the flour, red chilli powder and salt and pour this smooth mixture into the pot when the water is boiling, again stirring all the while. This is an easier method than the one described in Recipe 1. It also avoids lumps. Recipe 1 is quicker and needs more skill.
3. Adding all the available ingredients one by one to the boiling mixture gives it a distinct taste.

Recipe 4

1. Use the flour of other dals, such as lentils, moth bean, etc.
2. Follow recipe 1, 2 or 3.

Recipe 5

1. Soak the gram dal overnight and grind it with water in the morning, on a stone grinder.
2. Grind green chillies to a paste and add with salt to the water. It enhances the taste in this variant.
3. Prepare like Recipe 1, but with less water. This pithla tastes best when made as a thick paste.

Recipe 6

Use jowar flour instead of dal flour and prepare as in recipe 1, 2 or 3. Cook with plenty of water. This is made when a lot of guests come home unexpectedly. This was a bit watery and not thick.

Recipe 7

Prepare as in Recipes 1, 2 or 3, using more oil and less water. Such dry and thick variants are good to carry along during travel. Such pithlas are made in frying pans or woks instead of large pots.

Hulgyacha pithla (pithla of horse bean)

Hulga is also known as kulith in some parts of Maharashtra. Horse beans would be ground on a stone grinder. Some people would lightly roast the flour. Follow the same recipes as given above.

Horse beans were also used to make madga during winter. This was a soup of whole horse beans which was always served hot. It was believed that this acted as a remedy for kidney stones. The stones would break down into smaller pieces and pass through the urine after consuming madga.

Process of harvesting peanuts

In the past, the crop of groundnut was grown in two seasons, and was accordingly called summer groundnut and monsoon groundnut. The actual groundnuts, however, were ready to be harvested only in the following season. Mang and other labourers were paid in the form of groundnuts (instead of cash) as wages. Only

women and children would do this delicate and skilled task. They could see the hidden pods which men would overlook. One would have to squat, hold the plant, pull it out and remove the groundnut pods. They used kulav, a special tool meant to dig out the pods. Children loved to eat poge (tender peanuts) which could be eaten along with their soft shells.

Once the harvesting was done, the workers were paid their wages with a pre-decided portion of the harvest. It was fun to work in the groundnut-picking process, eating and working at the same time. A similar process was followed for mung and urad.

It wasn't possible to remove all the groundnut pods at one go. There would be a sarva (second round) of this process. This time the wages were paid at a higher rate: almost one-fourth of the amount harvested was offered. And then there was fersarva (third round) where the wages were doubled and half of what was harvested was given. Even after three rounds, some peanuts would be found while ploughing the field.

Groundnut pods, once accumulated, had to be broken to extract the kernels, i.e., peanuts. Women would be called up especially for this task. This was done mostly in summer. Peanuts were used for two reasons. Firstly, for consumption, oil extraction, etc., and secondly, as seeds for the next season. The latter task was more delicate. The kernels had to be kept intact for their use as seeds. In order to prevent rupture, women would either break the pod by pressing it between their thumb and index finger or by gently biting on on it. Their lips and mouths would be bruised due to this task. Wages were again in the form of pre-decided measures of peanuts. There would be wastage in the form of broken peanuts known as fut. These were included as a part of their wages. Mistresses would seat the labourers in separate groups according to caste. They would not accept the broken peanuts from Mahar or Mang women as the peanuts were considered to have been contaminated by their mouths. The mistress would grumble and squawk if the wastage by Dalit women was beyond acceptable levels. Such incompetent women were not hired the next time.

Pods were dried before being broken to extract peanuts for consumption. If the pods were stored without drying, they would catch fungus. Some peanuts would go bad and taste terrible. While eating peanuts, if by mistake such a peanut was crushed in the mouth, the entire mouth would be full of a rancid, bitter taste.

Peanut pithla

Pithla made from new, fresh peanuts and that made of old peanuts tastes different. The taste also depends on whether the peanuts are raw or roasted. This pithla was often used as a travel meal.

Ingredients

1. Onions, chopped
2. Salt
3. Red chilli powder or green chillies or yesur
4. Garlic cloves
5. Turmeric powder
6. Coriander leaves
7. Raw or roasted peanuts, crushed fine using a stone grinder

Method

1. Put a tava or a pan on a fire and add a little oil to the pan.
2. Add onions. The number of onions depend on the number of people.
3. Once the onions turn translucent, add a little water.
4. When the mixture starts boiling, add all the other condiments and let it cook. Reduce the heat.
5. Add the finely crushed peanuts. You need to toss and turn the mixture over low heat. Peanuts have a tendency to stick to the bottom of the pan if not turned continuously. It tastes good as a thick paste.

Peanut crush

It was an integral part of Mang and Mahar cooking. In most preparations, peanut crush was commonly used as a substitute for tempering in oil. It was always made by roasting the peanuts. The crush was used and stored in various ways.

Type one: Peanuts were roasted, crushed and put in a jar or a box.

Type two: Lots of rock salt was added to the mixture to prevent children from eating it as a pastime.

Type three: Lots of garlic and coriander were added in addition to the salt. This version would get soggy sometimes.

Karla (niger seeds) crush

Crushed niger seeds are also roasted and crushed, and used in the way peanuts are in various preparations or by themselves to make a chutney. No one would grow this crop by itself; it would always be a part of a mixed crop.

After the drought of 1972, the crop of sunflower became popular and people started using its seeds like niger seeds. Both plants' flowers were yellow and their dark seeds looked similar. People started calling this the bigger variant of niger seeds.

Sesame crush

This is also used at times in the same way as peanut crush.

Peanut khalbut/khalgut (peanut curry)

This was usually made when pulses or vegetables were not available. After seeing how many people were going to eat, they would put the pot on the stove and fill it with water accordingly. Once the water started boiling, they would add the basic ingredients in the recipe. The optional ingredients added to the curry depended on what was available.

Ingredients

1. Water
2. Red chillies or green chillies or yesur
3. Salt
4. Peanut crush
5. Fresh or old bhakris or chapatis

Optional

1. Onions, chopped
2. Turmeric powder
3. Coriander leaves
4. Oil
5. Mustard seeds
6. Cumin seeds

Method

1. Set pot with water on high heat and bring to a boil.
2. Add chillies, salt, onions and any other optional available ingredients (except oil, cumin and mustard seeds, which are for the final tempering).

3. When the onions are tender (if using), sprinkle in the peanut crush, stirring all the while. A little jowar flour can also be added as thickening.
4. While it is boiling, add the pieces of bhakri/chapati, and cover and cook on low heat till they are soft. They soak up the liquid and thicken the broth. Steamed and thick khalbut tastes delicious.
5. In a small pan, heat the oil, add the mustard and cumin seeds and, when they start sputtering, a few chillies if desired. Pour this on the cooked khalbut. Serve.

Kandavani (onion chutney)

This was usually made when pulses or vegetables were not available or to break the monotony of dals.

Ingredients

1. Oil
2. Onions, chopped
3. Red chilli powder or green chillies coarsely crushed or chopped or yesur
4. Salt

If available

1. Turmeric powder
2. Coriander leaves
3. Garlic cloves
4. Cumin seeds
5. Mustard seeds

Method

1. Heat oil in a pan.
2. Add mustard and cumin seeds, if using. Let them sputter.
3. Add the chopped onions and stir.
4. When the onions start sizzling, start adding all the other ingredients one by one. You need to turn and toss the mixture continuously.
5. Once the onions begin to release oil and water, turn off the flame, cover the pan and let the mixture cook in its own juices. Kandavani tastes good with bhakri.

Note: If available, an egg can be added to this.

Usal (curries made using legumes)

Usually, moth beans, mung, lentils, Bengal gram and horse beans would be sprouted and usals would be made using one of these. If the number of eaters were limited, a dry version was made on a tava or a pan. Otherwise, a watery gravy was made. Horse beans, however, tasted good only in the dry version.

Recipe 1

Ingredients

1. Oil
2. Mustard seeds
3. Cumin seeds
4. Onion

5. Salt
6. Red chillies or green chillies or yesur
7. Peanut crush
8. Coriander leaves
9. Turmeric powder
10. Sprouts of any dal mentioned above

Method:

1. Heat oil in a pan.
2. Add the mustard and cumin seeds, let them sputter.
3. Add the chopped onion and cook, stirring till tender.
4. Once the onions turn soft, add the other ingredients one at a time, while stirring.
5. Finally add the sprouts and sauté for some time.
6. Add as much water as you want. Usal is ready once the sprouts are cooked.

Recipe 2

In the summer season, toor, chana or mung would be soaked in water for making dals. Sometimes these soaked legumes were drained and used for making dry or watery usals (curries). The same recipe can also be used to make usal with soaked peanuts.

Ingredients

1. Garlic, crushed
2. Salt
3. Water
4. Soaked and drained legumes

Optional

1. Oil
2. Cumin and/or mustard seeds
3. Whole red or green chillies

Method

1. Mix the crushed garlic and salt in water.
2. Roast the legumes separately on a hot pan. Let it cook in its own juices for some time.
3. Once they are half cooked, add the garlic-salt water to it. Cook, stirring occasionally, till the water evaporates. Cover, turn off the flame, and let the usal cook in its own heat.
4. If desired, heat a little oil, and add mustard and cumin seeds, let them sputter, then add the chillies. Pour on the usal as tempering. Serve.

Hula (roasted pods)

There was no restriction on eating while harvesting or breaking the pods of groundnuts, mung, chana, etc. Labourers were allowed to eat as much as they felt like. Everyone knew how much a person could eat. The landlords would say, ‘No one ties the crop to their stomachs and steals.’ Nonetheless, stealing, hiding and taking away the produce was obviously not allowed.

Sometimes people would roast the pods by making a fire with sticks and broken branches gathered near the field. It was a treat to eat this hula (roasted pods) in the farm itself. However, people used to roast groundnut

pods in iron pots at home as well.

Daalga (broken dal)

As mentioned earlier, daalga refers to the broken pieces and remnants left behind while making dal. Although daalga is a part of dal, it tastes different and cooks faster. It was cooked on a tava or a pan as a thick and dry preparation.

Ingredients

1. Oil
2. Water
3. Chopped onion
4. Red chilli powder or green chillies or yesur
5. Salt
6. Daalga

If available

1. Turmeric powder
2. Coriander leaves

Method

1. Put oil and water in a pan and heat.
2. When the water starts boiling, add chopped onions, spices, salt and daalga. The dish is ready once the daalga is soft.

The word dal may have emerged from the process of dalne—grinding. Dal is feminine in Marathi. Its by-product daalga is masculine. Daalga is not a viable seed and cannot germinate no matter where it is sown. A similar word, dalga, is used to refer to an effeminate man—one who feels like a woman trapped in a male body—one who cannot reproduce.

Kalana (smaller powdery pieces of dal)

Kalana also means ‘can’t figure out’ in Marathi. One cannot make out the original legume from these small pieces. That is probably why it was named kalana. It is the powdery substance which is obtained while separating dal, daalga, konda and waste. A pithla can be made using kalana. Kalana bhakris are also popular. It is said that kalana is high in fibre.

Recipe

Ingredients

1. Kalana
2. Jowar or bajra flour
3. Salt
4. Water

Method

1. Make a dough of kalana with a little bajra or jowar, water and a pinch of salt.
2. Roll out carefully as it tends to break.

3. Roast on a hot tava on both sides till slightly charred. This brings out the best taste.
4. Serve with a sharp chutney, such as thecha or kharda. It makes a delicious combination.

Pendpala

Pendpala is mainly made using toor dal. This was made as a takeaway meal for travel.

Ingredients

1. Oil
2. Toor dal
3. Yesur
4. Salt

If available

1. Onions, chopped
2. Garlic cloves, chopped or crushed
3. Coriander leaves
4. Cumin seeds
5. Mustard seeds

Method

1. Heat oil in tava or a pan. Temper with mustard and cumin seeds, if using.
2. Add the chopped onions and garlic. Fry till light golden.
3. Add a little water.
4. Add the dal, yesur and salt. There should be enough water to cover the dal about ½-inch deep. Lower the heat to medium-low. Cover.
5. Let it cook slowly till all the water evaporates. Reduce heat to low and cook, stirring carefully, so the dal cooks without burning. It is an acquired skill to do this.

This dish keeps for many days. Adding onions or other vegetable ingredients, however, shortens its shelf life.
Any pulses, sprouts or legumes, would invariably be blackened when cooked in iron utensils.

Dal-kanda (dal and onions)

This is prepared using the same recipe as that of pendpala, but it is not as dry as pendpala. There is no need to stick to toor dal; any dal can be used. The proportion of onions is greater, hence the name dal-kanda.

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Rainy season, seasonal, all-season vegetables

Every year the season of fresh vegetables would begin after the first rain.

Meat was consumed at various annual fairs of different villages till the end of the month of Chaitra (around May). In the hot, dry summer, women would make things that needed drying, such as pulses, fries, pickles, etc., taking full advantage of the bright sunlight during this time. The ploughing of the field, harvesting, second rounds of harvest, etc., had been done by then. Cultivated farmland lay waiting for the rainy season to bring forth life from the dormant seeds in her womb.

It began to rain in the last days of the month of Vaishakh (May–June) and the gentle insects 'rohinya' (named after Rohini nakshatra; the long-horn beetle) with long 'moustaches' (antennae) would pop up everywhere. The fields and dams that looked parched and arid during the months of Chaitra and Vaishakh would start looking refreshed, as though just woken from their sleep, ready for new creation. Grass sprouts that had sprung up after the first splash of showers seemed to be looking up at the sky with curiosity.

By the time the monsoon started, the earth looked pleased with all the water it had drunk and the release from dry heat. The quenched earth would now anxiously await the sowing of seeds. Farmers would be appeased by the arrival of monsoons. Everything looked fresh, green and gay.

However, for Mahars and Mangs the arrival of this season was a time of worry—it brought a big possibility of hunger pangs to follow. They would have to think hard and plan rigorously to survive the next three to four months without much work and food. During the monsoon, they were unemployed, as the heavy rainfall prevented agricultural or any other work that required them as labourers. These communities could store little grain and, due to lack of daily wages, they couldn't buy much from the market. So, they would starve and rely mainly on seasonal vegetables and dead or killed animals. Fortunately, the tiny sprouts of many weeds would have grown and firmed up by then. Some of these greens seemed to come into existence only to satiate the hunger of these two castes.

Tarvat (a rainy season leafy vegetable)

Within eight to fifteen days after the arrival of the Rohini and Mriga (astrological 'lunar mansions') rains, the new seedlings of tarvat (avaram senna or *senna auriculata*), with their rounded bright-green leaves, used to pop up along with other plants and grasses. People would pick the leaves of plants that grew on clean patches of land while avoiding the dirty places along the roadside or areas reserved for defecation.

Only tender leaves are used. When it is older, it becomes bitter. The plant has yellow flowers and pods that look like those of shikakai (*Acacia concinna*). In a good forest, tarvat grows six to seven feet high. Animals do not eat its leaves. Goats sometimes nibble on the pods. Since it does not have thorns and is a small shrub, it used to be cut, dried and stored every year to use as fuel.

Recipe

Essential ingredients

1. Tarvat leaves
2. Water

3. Garlic cloves
4. Rock salt

If available

1. Oil
2. Onions, chopped
3. Peanut crush
4. Red chilli powder or green chillies, coarsely ground

Method

1. Wash the tarvat thoroughly. Remove its roots, other grass, sticks, etc. The good parts of the vegetable are visible and they need to be selected, discarding the non-edible parts.
2. Add a lot of water to a pot, add the leaves and cook until soft.
3. Once fully cooked, take out the leaves and squeeze well so as to remove all the water. Separate the stuck leaves, creating a loose heap.
4. Crush garlic along with rock salt. Add this mixture to the vegetable and mix well by hand. The tarvat vegetable is ready to eat.

Options

1. You can also add red chilli powder and peanut crush.
2. If you don't have oil, you can add peanut crush to the vegetable to give it some richness.
3. If you have oil, heat it and add this garlic-tarvat mixture to it. Sauté it for some time.
4. If you have both oil and onions, first sauté the onions in the hot oil. Then add the tarvat mixture, cover and reduce heat. Let it cook in its own steam.

In some houses, they would serve a lot of this tarvat preparation and very little bhakri. (It is a norm otherwise to serve bhakri or rice in larger proportions, and dal, vegetables, salad, chutneys and pickles in progressively smaller quantities in that order.) Some people would mix this vegetable in jowar flour and make bhakri out of it.

Various all-season vegetables

A number of plants grew all year round in the wild, and they were all cooked in the same way. These useful plants included tandulja, chikani or chikana, katmat and turamat. They grew on the embankments of the fields, on the riverside and on the sides of the irrigation water channels dug out for fields. Their natural growth seems to have been curbed after farmers started using pipes to irrigate the fields. Tandulja or katmat (spiny amaranth or *Amaranthus spinosus*) has flower combs like those of the rajgira plant (amaranth). These do not taste good once they become old and tough, so they are gathered when young and tender.

Recipe

Essential ingredients

1. Plenty of any of the above vegetables because they shrink once cooked
2. Salt
3. Garlic

If available

1. Oil
2. Red chilli powder or green chillies, coarsely ground
3. Peanut crush
4. Onions

Method

1. Select the good parts of the tandulja, wash well.
2. Put the vegetable in plenty of boiling water.
3. Follow the recipe for tarvat.

That's how these vegetables are made. All these vegetables had to be squeezed and then properly mixed with salt, garlic and other ingredients. It is important that everything is mixed well, else it doesn't taste good. All these vegetables are eaten along with jowar bhakri.

Hagarya ghol

Hagarya ghol (purslane or *Portulaca oleracea*) grows perennially along the banks of the river or other water bodies, but is more widespread and visible in the rainy season. It is pale greenish-yellow. The stems are reddish-pink. When this vegetable becomes old and rough, yellow flowers blossom on top. This vegetable is full of water. Studies have found that purslane is highly nutritious.

Recipe 1

Ingredients

1. Hagarya ghol
2. Red chilli powder
3. Peanut crush
4. Jowar powder
5. Salt

If available

1. Garlic cloves, crushed
2. Coriander leaves

Method

1. Hagarya ghol grows near muddy areas so it needs to be washed well.
2. Put a pan full of water to boil. Add the vegetable. It is delicate and cooks quickly.
3. Add the red chilli powder, peanut crush, a bit of jowar flour and salt to taste. Mix well. Let it simmer for 5–7 minutes.
4. Add garlic and coriander, if available.

Recipe 2

Ingredients

1. Toor or mung dal
2. Hagarya ghol
3. Red chilli powder

4. Peanut crush
5. Jowar powder
6. Salt

If available

1. Garlic cloves, crushed
2. Coriander leaves

Method

1. Cook toor dal or mung dal. When it is slightly cooked, add the washed vegetable.
2. When the mixture is fully cooked, add some or all of the above ingredients in it.

Recipe 3

If any of the above vegetable preparations are left over, make bhakri by kneading it into jowar flour. They taste very good and don't need any accompaniment.

'Hagarya' means one that keeps defecating and 'ghol' means a scandal or chaos. The name of this vegetable literally means that which makes you poop—a laxative. But it is no such thing in reality. It is observed that sometimes this vegetable grows on the land reserved for defecation. It is also observed that people eating this vegetable experience a clean colon the next day. Occasionally, some people suffer from dysentery after consuming it.

Barka ghol or chigal

Another all-season vegetable, barka ghol and chigal are popular names for wild purslane or *Portulaca quadrifida*, a variant of hagarya ghol. 'Barka' means small. It has reddish-pink stems like the common purslane or hagarya ghol and very small leaves. The leaves are full of water. This vegetable is sour to taste. It is possible that it is called ghol because the stems of both varieties (hagarya ghol and barka ghol) are intertwined and a bit complex in appearance.

It is a delicate vegetable that grows horizontally, parallel to the ground. It is full of mud, waste material and roots. Therefore, you have to clean and wash it well.

Recipe 1

Ingredients

1. Oil
2. Onions, chopped
3. Red chilli powder
4. Salt

Method

1. Heat oil in a pan.
2. Add the chopped onions.
3. Add the barka ghol and mix well.
4. If desired, add red chilli powder. Mix. Add salt to taste and mix again. Sprinkle very little water since the vegetable has a lot of water.
5. Cover and let it cook over low heat.

Recipe 2

Add masur dal (red lentils) along with the barka ghol in the above recipe. This dal changes the taste completely. Usually this is eaten with jowar bhakri.

Recipe 3

Bhakri made with this vegetable tastes delicious when roasted and mildly charred on a tava. Children and adults used to eat barka ghol plain bhakris or along with kharda (coarsely ground green chillies and garlic).

Kurdu

Kurdu (*Celosia argentea* or silver cock's comb) is another weed used as a leafy vegetable that grows in the fields as well as along the riverside. It is from the Amaranthaceae family, like tandulja and rajgira. At the beginning of the rainy season, the tiny plants grow very fast in a couple of months. Although mature kurdu is not useful for humans, goats love to eat their leaves. Tender kurdu's fresh leaves were plucked and cooked like tarvat. Kurdu grows up to three to four feet high. It has silvery white combs of flowers. They turn reddish-pink when ripe. Kurdu is a nuisance for farmers.

Paathari

Paathari (country dandelion or *Launaea procumbens*) grows near dams, fields, anywhere. It spreads like a flower on the ground. It has only five or six leaves. In the middle of these leaves grow long stems with flowers. This vegetable is good to be eaten in its tender form. After growing, its leaves develop small thorns and it starts to taste rough and bitter. Goats also love this vegetable.

Recipe

1. Select a paathari with young leaves. Uproot the whole plant.
2. Wash and wipe it well. Remove the roots and pick the tender young leaves.
3. Eat them raw like a salad, just like raw spring onion is eaten.

Rajgira (amaranth)

It is one of the permitted edible items during religious fasts. The flowers appear in big colourful combs. Tandulja is in the same family, Amaranthacaea, but it has smaller combs. Amaranth seeds are sown and the plants cultivated. Tender leaves of amaranth would be cooked in the same way as tarvat.

Bhopli (pumpkin vines)

Tender leaves of pumpkin vines are used to prepare a dry curry. These vines grow rapidly during the rainy season. Leaves are plucked, washed, chopped and cooked following the recipes for tarvat or tandulja.

Shevgyacha pala (moringa leaves)

Tender leaves of moringa (drumstick tree) were used to prepare a curry. They would be cooked in boiling water. After cooking, the leaves would be squeezed and then cooked like tarvat or the first recipe of hagarya ghol. These leaves would also be dried and used in pithla. The moringa trees exude a gum. Pills were made out of this gum and given to people suffering from diarrhoea.

Ambadi (roselle)

The ambadi (*Hibiscus sabdariffa* or roselle) grows up to six feet tall and has very attractive flowers. It is also referred to as sorrel leaves because of their sour taste. When the plants were small, their tender leaves were used as a vegetable.

Farmers used to sow ambadi as a crop, as ropes made from these plants were of good quality. When the plants were fully grown, they were handed over to the Mangs. They would trim the stems, tie the stalks in bundles and put them in a stream, river or large puddle for soaking. After eight days, the stalks were taken out of the water and their bark was peeled off. This bark, which was known as wakh, was washed and dried. Ropes were made from this dried wakh. Handling these soaked ambadi stems and wakh made the skin itchy.

Stems looked shining white after removing the wakh. They were not thrown away but used after being cut into shorter pieces, called sankadya. It was used as a quick and cheap fuel, especially during the monsoon. One such stick could kindle many people's kitchen fires. Hence the metaphor for a promiscuous woman: 'A single, slender wire, can ignite many a fire.'

Ambadi is also called Shakambhari (a name for the goddess Parvati). It is believed that once upon a time, during a famine, the Goddess saved many lives by growing as an ambadi plant. Therefore, it has a special place in many pujas of the Goddess and is offered as a naivedya (holy offering).

Ambadi curry

Only the tender leaves are used for preparing the curry. The leaves are very sour. So they are boiled in plenty of water. They are squeezed and then cooked following a recipe such as the one for tarvat.

Ambadi bhakri

Boiled and squeezed ambadi leaves are mixed in jowar flour, with salt to taste. These bhakris, once roasted well, taste delicious and can be eaten without any accompaniment.

Ambadi plants become thorny once fully grown. They have pretty, yellowish-white, large flowers. In a few days, the flowers form juicy fruits. These fruits are served as a side dish in a meal.

Recipe

Ingredients

1. Ambadi fruit
2. Oil
3. Red chilli powder or yesur
4. Salt

Method

1. Heat oil in pan. Add the ambadi fruit and stir.
2. Add seasonings, sauté. Serve.

When the fruits ripen, seeds are formed, which are shaped like the beads of a vajratik (traditional Maharashtrian necklace). Chutneys were made from these seeds just like those made with peanuts, flaxseeds or niger seeds. However, this ambadi chutney was eaten as an accompaniment and not used in cooked vegetables like peanuts or flaxseeds were.

Javasachi bonde (flax fruits)

The use of flaxseeds is common and well known. But its fruits are also eaten just like ambadi fruits, adding salt, oil, yesur and red chilli powder. Flax is harvested during the rabi season. When the plant is fully grown, it bears these fruits. This preparation tastes delicious.

Waghate

Waghate are the fruits of a thorny vine (Ceylon caper or *Capparis zeylanica*) that climbs taking the support of anything in its way. Waghate resemble small oval green limes, but on cutting open, they are like tiny gourds, with large seeds embedded in white inside. They are cooked as a vegetable. The leaves and fruits of this tough vine are also tough, but the tender young fruit can be cooked entirely. Older waghate are cooked after removing the harder seeds embedded within. In the month of Shravan, waghate are used in the worship of Lord Shiva.

Recipe

This preparation tastes great as a dry vegetable or with a thick gravy.

Ingredients

1. Gram dal
2. Waghate, cut in pieces
3. Chilli powder or yesur
4. Salt
5. Coriander leaves
6. Oil
7. Cumin or mustard seeds

Method

1. Take a pot with some water, add the gram dal and put it to cook. Keep just enough water to cook the dal so it is dry or nearly so.
2. When the dal is boiling, add the waghate.
3. When the dal is cooked, add the chilli powder or yesur, salt and coriander.
4. Temper with cumin or mustard seeds, whichever you prefer. Serve.

Tekale (mushrooms)

Mushrooms that grow naturally in the forest during the monsoon are called tekale. An anthill is called a ‘tek’ in this region—as is any small elevation. Tek also means to touch or to take support. Tekale grow in fertile and crumbly soil. There is a poisonous variety of mushrooms known as ‘kutryachya chhatrya’ (dog’s umbrellas) which are not touched even by goats. These mushrooms look like fully open umbrellas and they are black from inside. Your hands get soiled with black spores if you touch them. These black ones are poisonous. Edible mushrooms are firm, shining white externally and creamy white from the inside. Even these can only be selected by those who really know their mushrooms.

Recipe

This is made using the recipe for liver. All spices used for a non-vegetarian gravy are used in this recipe. Mushroom gravy should not be made watery thin. They shouldn’t be overcooked either. This vegetable tastes like boka (kidneys).

Dodya (unripe figs)

The audumbar tree (fig or *Ficus glomerata*) is called umbar in villages and the ripened fruits are also called umbar. Unripe figs are called dodya. According to Hindu mythology, it is a sacred tree. It is believed that Lord Dutta lives near this tree. The fig tree does not have visible flowers (actually, the fig is a bulbous stem

with tiny flowers arranged within what we call the ‘fruit’). It is said that only a virtuous person gets to see a flower of this tree, which is as big as the wheel of a bullock cart. This tree bears fruits in all seasons, in clusters that appear anywhere on the stem—from the trunk to the branches. Tender dodyas were cooked in two ways—as a curry and as bhakri.

Dodya curry

This was not an easy recipe. After eating this dish, one’s hunger was satiated completely and one would not feel hungry for a long time. This vegetable used to cause constipation.

Ingredients

1. Dodyas
2. Red chilli powder or coarsely crushed green chillies
3. Salt
4. Oil
5. Onions, chopped

If available

1. Turmeric powder
2. Coriander leaves

Method

1. Add plenty of water to the pan and heat it.
2. Add the dodyas. It takes a long time to cook.
3. Once the dodyas are tender, remove them from the water. Allow them to cool down. Mash them well.
4. Add the red chilli powder or coarsely crushed green chilli and salt to the mashed dodyas. Mix well.
5. Heat oil in a pan. Add chopped onion to the hot oil and fry, stirring constantly. When the onion turns light brown, add the dodya mixture. Mix well, and sauté for some time till it is well done.
6. Add turmeric powder and coriander leaves, if available, and mix well. Cover the pan, lower the heat and let it steam about 20 minutes. Serve.

Dodya bhakri

When there was a shortage of flour in the house, bhakris were made mixing dodya into the flour.

Ingredients

1. Dodya
2. Bajra or jowar flour
3. Salt
4. Red chilli powder

Method

1. Boil the dadya, drain and cool.
2. Mash them thoroughly.
3. Mix in flour with a little salt and chilli powder, and knead into a dough, using as much water as required.

4. Roll out the bhakris and cook on tava. They taste delicious when roasted well.

Ripe figs are not always sweet. If the tree is near water, the fruits often taste insipid. Many a time, the fruits contain hairy black flies or the white larvae of these flies. If these are eaten along with the flies, it acts as a preventive measure for conjunctivitis. Or so they say! There are many who break open the fruits, throw away the flies and eat the remaining part.

'He can't tell figs from testes' was a phrase commonly used to refer to naïve people. But actually, ripe figs do look just like testicles when kept in a pair close to each other. In villages, women swear at men and boys, calling them 'dodyachya'—meaning one with useless balls.

Shelvaticha taur or bhokar

Shelvaticha taur or bhokar are the fruits and flowers of the Indian cherry or glue berry (lasoda or *Cordia indica*). Fresh flowers that blossom in bunches are known as taur. This happens before the monsoon. The shelvat tree is also large like a mango tree but is tougher.

One would bring the taur home. After cleaning, it was roasted and then washed. Oil was added to a pan. Chopped onion was added when it was heated. Once it started releasing oil, yesur, salt and taur were added. It was sautéed for a while and then covered and allowed to simmer over low heat.

The ripening period of the shelvat fruits coincided with schools' re-opening time during the month of June. They came handy for using their juice as a glue to stick the covers of textbooks and notebooks. These fruits are bland. They make the saliva even more sticky. The mouth sticks even while spitting out its seeds. 'To put a shelvat in one's arse' is a commonly used phrase when an unwanted or unending task is assigned to someone.

Chigur (flowers of tamarind)

Chigur or tamarind flowers were eaten, too. The tamarind tree blossoms copiously. There were usually a few trees in or near the village on common lands, which were accessible to everyone. Chigur goes well with red lentils. This sour dal tastes good.

Recipe

Ingredients

1. Oil
2. Onions, chopped
3. Red lentils
4. Red chilli powder or chopped green chillies
5. Salt
6. Chigur

Method

1. Heat oil in a tava or a pan.
2. When it is hot, add the chopped onion. Stir.
3. Add the red lentils, red chilli powder or green chillies and salt to taste.
4. Add the chigur and sauté it for a while. Sprinkle some water, cover, and lower the heat. Let it cook.

Gabhulaleli chinch

Tamarind trees, like mango trees, produce a lot of ripened fruits. A ripened tamarind is called gabhulaleli chinch, which literally means 'pregnant tamarind'. The taste just lingers on one's tongue and it is so divine

that words cannot describe it. A delicious dal was made with tamarind. Semi-ripe tamarind pods, that looked yellowish-green, were picked from the nearest tree for this.

Recipe

Ingredients

1. Toor dal
2. Whole semi-ripe tamarind pods
3. Red chilli powder
4. Turmeric powder
5. Salt
6. Oil
7. Onions

Optional

1. Mustard seeds
2. Cumin seeds

Method

1. Put toor dal, whole tamarind pods and water in a pot. Boil till dal is cooked.
2. The pod shells will have slipped off by this time. Allow the contents of the pot to cool down enough to handle by hand. Mash the tamarind by hand to free the pulp.
3. Remove the pod shells, fibre and seeds and throw away.
4. Add the red chilli powder, turmeric and salt. Mix well.
5. In another vessel, heat the oil, temper with mustard and cumin, and add the onions. Fry the onions till brown.
6. Pour the dal and tamarind mixture into this and mix well. Serve.

Kardi (safflower)

The phrase, ‘No worms in kardi, and no pain to the dead body’, refers to what is usually observed—that kardi never gets infected with any insects or pests. Instead of sowing the crop separately, farmers grow it along with jowar in the rabi season. Thus, farmers get safflower oil along with peanut oil for their diet. A few days after sowing, the fresh and tender leaves of kardi are eaten as a vegetable. It is called kardichi bhaji (safflower curry). The thorns on the plant keep growing with age. Finally, the flowers blossom and with pollination, safflower seeds are formed.

Recipe 1

Follow the recipes for tarvat or tandulja.

Recipe 2

Follow the first recipe of hagarya ghol.

Recipe 3

Add dal as per the second recipe of hagarya ghol.

Karad khichda

Karad khichda is a khichdi or porridge made of jowar and kardi-seed milk. During the rabi season, jowar was first harvested from the field and then kardi. Both the fresh crops were used to make this porridge.

Preparation of jowar

1. Wash and grind jowar with a stone grinder until the skin and waste come off. Separate them and discard.
2. Spread out and dry the ground and cleaned jowar.

Preparation of kardi milk

1. Wash and grind kardi seeds like jowar.
2. Mix with a suitable amount of water. The fibre and waste will float on the surface. Skim this off and discard.
3. Strain the liquid through a sieve or clean, coarse cloth. This thick juice is known as milk of kardi.

Ingredients for karad khichda

1. Jowar, washed, ground, cleaned and dried as above
2. Salt
3. Milk of kardi, extracted as above

Method

1. Put water in a heavy-bottomed vessel to boil.
2. Wash the dried jowar and add it to the boiling water along with salt.
3. Cook till the jowar is soft, stirring occasionally. (This is the khichda or porridge that was made for bullocks and Mangs on the day before the pola festival. Mangs would add the leftovers of this khichda to their fermented dish, ambura.)
4. Add kardi milk and mix well. The karad khichda is ready.

Harbharyachi bhaji

Harbharyachi bhaji is the vegetable culled from the chickpea plant—it comprises the young shoots and leaves. It is harvested during the rabi season. One has to pluck its tender stems without disturbing the roots. One acquires this skill with practice.

In winter, dew accumulates on the crop and it gets sour due to a chemical reaction. This sour dew is called ‘amb’. If the crop is grown on dry land, this amb is very sour and if the crop is grown near water bodies on moist land, it is less sour. It itches a lot if you touch it accidentally while plucking the stems. You need to cover your hands with cloth and then pick them if the amb is in excess. This amb is considered medicinal according to Ayurveda. People used to collect it by absorbing it in a cloth before sunrise and use it for medicinal purposes.

These stems with tender leaves are dried and stored. It comes in handy during times of shortages. This can be cooked quickly in times of emergency. Fresh stems are also used. It tastes different in the two forms. Neither form is washed before cooking, as its taste deteriorates.

Recipe 1

Ingredients

1. Harbharyachi bhaji
2. Oil

3. Readymade peanut chutney or the following:

    i. Garlic, crushed
    ii. Red chilli powder
    iii. Salt
    iv. Peanut crush

Method

1. Shake the tender stems well so as to remove dust and worms, if any.
2. Add a little oil to a pan. Then add a little water.
3. Once it is hot, add crushed garlic, salt, red chilli powder, peanut crush (or add readymade peanut chutney) and stir.
4. Add the stems. Mix everything well and sauté it for some time. There is a possibility of everything getting sticky on one side of the pan and the other leaves remaining dry, so you have to be very careful to mix it well.
5. Cover and simmer over low heat. It cooks quickly as the stems are tender.

Recipe 2

Ingredients

Same as above

Method

1. Add a little oil to a pan. Then add a little water.
2. Set layers of the vegetable and the seasoning in turn. Spread a layer of stems and leaves then sprinkle salt, garlic, chilli and peanut crush, or the readymade peanut chutney. Repeat the layers.
3. Finally, sprinkle a little water, cover and allow to cook over low heat. Before serving, mix it well.

Recipe 3

Ingredients

1. Dried harbharyachi bhaji
2. Oil
3. Readymade peanut chutney or the following:

    i. Garlic, crushed
    ii. Red chilli powder
    iii. Peanut crush

4. Salt

Method

Sprinkle water on the dried vegetable and follow one of the above recipes.

Recipe 4

Ingredients

1. Dried harbharyachi bhaji
2. Jowar flour
3. Garlic, crushed
4. Salt
5. Red chilli powder
6. Peanut crush

Optional

1. Oil

Method

1. Take the dried harbharyachi. Add to this a dry mixture of jowar flour, crushed garlic cloves, salt, red chilli powder and peanut crush. Mix thoroughly and keep aside.
2. Place a pan on the fire. If desired, first temper with oil.
3. Add water to the pan according to the number of people eating, and let it boil.
4. When the water boils, add the dry mixture and stir well so that there are no lumps.
5. Reduce the heat, cover the curry and let it simmer for five minutes. This is served with jowar bhakri.

Besan (Bengal gram flour) was also used instead of jowar flour. But it overpowered the original taste of the vegetable. Some people would not use any flour. This version would make the teeth sour and numb.

For the festival of Champashashthi, a special feast was prepared of sajgurya (lamps made from bajra flour) and this vegetable.

Lekuravali paat

Lekuravali paat are tender spring onions. Onion seedlings are first sown in a nursery and when ready, they are transplanted. Onion seedlings are delicate and have to be handled gently, and women usually did this task. While planting, some of the plants are found to have dual sprouts, while some of the young sprouts are withered. Neither of these can be planted. Instead of throwing away these sprouts, women would collect them in a fold of their saris. These ultra-tender fresh leaves are called ‘lekurvali paat’, literally meaning a leaf which gives birth to many more leaves. These unviable, muddy seedlings would be taken home to supplement the meal.

Recipe

Ingredients

1. Onion seedlings
2. Oil
3. Red or green chillies
4. Salt

If available

1. Garlic, coarsely crushed
2. Peanut crush

Method

1. Wash the leaves gently to remove the mud that covers them (from the handling during transplanting), discard the waste and chop the good leaves.
2. Heat oil in a pan, add the chopped leaves and lower the heat to minimum. Mix gently.
3. Add the chillies and salt. Mix again.
4. If available, add crushed garlic and/or peanut crush, and mix gently but well. Cover and allow to simmer on low heat for five minutes. Serve.

This dish cooks quickly as it is very tender. It tastes quite different from the regular spring onion.

Mirchichya ropanchya pananchi bhaji (leaves of chilli seedlings)

Mirchichya ropanchya pananchi bhaji refers to the leaves of chilli seedlings as a vegetable. Chilli seedlings are first sown in a nursery and then transplanted. While planting these seedlings, a few bigger leaves wither and have to be picked off. Instead of throwing them away, the worker women would collect them in their sari folds. The tender leaves were used as a vegetable.

Recipe

Ingredients

1. Leaves of chilli seedlings
2. Oil
3. Garlic, coarsely ground
4. Salt

Optional:

i. Peanut crush

Method

1. Wash the leaves.
2. Heat a little oil in a hot pan.
3. First add the garlic, immediately followed by the leaves and salt. Mix.
4. Add peanut crush if desired.
5. Cover the pan and allow to cook on a low heat. This vegetable cooks quickly. There is no need to add water as the leaves release water while cooking. However, if you find it too dry then you can sprinkle a little water.

Methi (fenugreek)

Fenugreek was plentiful in winter. No matter how large a quantity was cooked, it was never sufficient as it shrinks to almost nothing when cooked but was always made in a dry form. So, adding water to increase its quantity was not an option. It was a task to clean it too. Therefore, it was made only when women had some spare time at their disposal. It was prepared in various ways, depending on the quantity available and the number of mouths to be fed. If the quantity was too little, many people preferred not to cook fenugreek leaves, but eat them raw. As an accompaniment to meat curry, methi leaves were eaten like salad just as they would eat raw onions and spring onions.

Methi was picked and always broken down with the fingers and fingernails to remove the roots and tough stems. It was never chopped using knives or the vili. It was observed that cutting fenugreek with a metal implement would make it darker and bitter. It was washed only if it was visibly dirty or muddy. Mature flowering methi tastes bitter. It develops pods and seeds after the flowers appear.

Recipe 1

Ingredients

1. Oil
2. Green chillies, coarsely broken into small pieces
3. Methi leaves with tender stems
4. Garlic, coarsely crushed
5. Salt

Optional

1. Peanut crush
2. Green chilli paste
3. Red chilli powder

Method

1. Heat a little oil in a pan or tava.
2. Add small pieces of green chillies, coarsely broken using one's nails and fingers.
3. Once the pieces start dancing in the hot oil, add the methi leaves (along with their tender stems). Lower the heat.
4. Add the coarsely crushed garlic and salt. Splash a little water, cover the lid and let it simmer over low heat. Mix well before serving.
5. You can add peanut crush or green chilli paste. Alternatively, you can add red chilli powder. Using both also works. Each variant gives a different taste.

Recipe 2

Ingredients

1. Mung or toor dal
2. Oil
3. Green chillies, broken in small pieces, or red chilli powder
4. Garlic, coarsely crushed
5. Methi
6. Salt
7. Peanut crush

Method

1. Soak mung or toor dal in water. When the dal is well soaked, drain the excess water.
2. Heat oil in tava, kadhai or a pan. Add the green chillies, which should be coarsely broken using one's nails and fingers. If you don't have green chillies, add red chilli powder.
3. When the chillies start spluttering, add the soaked dal, coarsely crushed garlic, methi and salt. Some also add peanut crush. Mix well.
4. Add just enough water for cooking the dal, cover, and reduce the heat to low. Cook till dal is tender but not overcooked. Toss and mix. Serve.

Recipe 3

Methi is cooked with mutton, with the meat either in pieces (methi-mutton) or as mince (kheema-methi).

Ingredients

1. Mutton in pieces with/without bone
2. Oil
3. Methi
4. Green chillies in small pieces or red chilli powder

If available

1. Ginger-garlic paste
2. Coriander leaves, finely chopped

Method

1. Boil the mutton with the ginger-garlic paste, coriander leaves and a little salt till the meat is soft. There should be enough water to make a stock that will form the gravy. Keep aside.
2. Add oil to a pan and heat it up.
3. Add green chillies or red chilli powder, immediately followed by methi leaves. Mix well.
4. Add the boiled mutton and stock.
5. Once the methi is cooked, serve it with jowar bhakri.

Recipe 4

Prepare kheema-methi using the recipe above for methi-mutton.

Options

1. You can also add methi directly to the cooked mutton and soup. Add red chilli powder. Let it cook till the methi is tender. Methi cooked in mutton soup also tastes delicious. There is no need to add extra salt in this as it is already added while boiling the mutton.

Note: Do not add yesur or peanut crush as they overpower the distinctive flavour of methi cooked with meat.

Cleaning and cutting methi using one's nails and fingers, is a tedious task. Once that is done, it's an easy and quick recipe that tastes excellent. It is also over-exploited in a totally different way (other than cooking or eating) by grooms during wedding ceremonies when they are supposed to 'speak aloud the name of their brides'. This ceremony is popular in Marathi weddings where the bride and the groom have to speak out the name of their partner, weaving it in rhymes. Brides are usually very creative and enthusiastic and they come up with fresh, unused lines. Lazy grooms, however, use the same old verse, which says:

'Methi the tastiest veggie ever
—— is my loving wife forever.'

Shepu (dill)

It is such a unique vegetable that people either love it or cannot stand it at all. It is made in a dry form when cooked as an independent vegetable. But when more ingredients are added, a porridge-like mixture of this vegetable tastes excellent as well.

Recipe 1

Ingredients

1. Shepu, roughly chopped
2. Oil
3. Green chillies
4. Peanut crush
5. Salt

Method

1. Wash, drain, clean and chop the shepu.
2. Heat a little oil in a pan or tava. Add small pieces of green chillies, coarsely broken using one's fingernails.
3. Once the pieces start spluttering, add the shepu. Mix well. Lower the heat.
4. Add coarsely crushed garlic, peanut crush and salt. Mix.
5. Splash a little water into the mixture, cover and let it simmer over low heat. Mix well before serving.

Note: Some people add red chilli powder in addition to green chillies. Some add green chilli paste, and others skip the peanuts. The vegetable tastes outstanding in all these variants.

Recipe 2

Ingredients

1. Mung dal (or toor or daalga)
2. Green chillies
3. Shepu, roughly chopped
4. Garlic, crushed
5. Salt
6. Peanut crush

Method

1. Soak mung dal before cooking.
2. In a pan or tava, heat the oil.
3. Add green chillies, coarsely broken using one's fingernails, and dal. Then add the shepu.
4. Add crushed garlic cloves, salt and, if available, peanut crush. Add very little water, just enough to cook the dal. Cover and cook on low heat. The vegetable should not turn watery. Serve.

Note: Some people dry roast the mung before using. This changes the taste, giving it a smoky flavour.

Recipe 3

This is the same recipe as above but prepared with fresh mung beans. They do not need to be soaked. Here, too, the mung is cooked adding just enough water.

Recipe 4

Dill, like methi, is cooked with mutton pieces (shepu-mutton) and with mince (shepu-kheema). Follow the recipe of methi-mutton and kheema-methi. You can use meat with bones or boneless, whatever is available.

Ingredients

1. Mutton in pieces with/without bone

2. Ginger-garlic paste
3. Coriander leaves
4. Salt
5. Oil
6. Green chillies, broken into small pieces
7. Shepu, chopped

Method

1. Boil the mutton with the ginger-garlic paste, coriander leaves and a little salt till the meat is soft.
2. Add oil to a pan and heat it up.
3. Add the green chillies, immediately followed by the shepu. Mix well.
4. Add the boiled mutton and very little stock.
5. When the shepu is cooked, serve the dish with jowar bhakri.

Tip: This recipe tastes good with green chillies and that too only in the dry form. Do not use yesur, peanut crush, dals, red chilli powder, etc.

Chuka (green sorrel)

Chuka (*Rumex acetosa* or green sorrel) is a sour leafy vegetable. Chuka has many other meanings in Marathi. Chuka means mistakes. Small nails used for footwear are called chuka. If a stitch in a garment is loose, it is also known as chuka.

Some people call it ‘ambat chuka’ meaning ‘sour chuka’. Chuka is always sour so why this tautology? In villages, chuka is rarely cooked by itself. It is always combined with some other ingredient. Chuka is delicate like hagarya ghol. Clean, chop and then wash it. Washing after chopping reduces the strong acidic taste.

Recipe 1

Ingredients

1. Chana, mung or toor dal
2. Chuka, chopped and washed
3. Garlic, crushed and some chopped for the tempering
4. Red chilli powder
5. Salt
6. Peanut crush
7. Jowar flour
8. Oil

If available

1. Turmeric powder
2. Coriander leaves

Method

1. Add the dal to boiling water.
2. When the dal is slightly cooked, add the chopped and washed chuka into it.
3. Add the crushed garlic cloves.
4. When the dal is fully cooked, add the red chilli powder, salt, peanut crush and jowar flour. Mix well. Add turmeric powder and coriander leaves, if available.

5. Cook for five minutes on low heat.
6. Heat the oil in a small pan, add chopped garlic and fry it till golden. Pour this tempering into the dal.

Recipe 2

Similar to the above recipe, the only change being that in step 4, replace red chilli powder with coarsely crushed green chillies or small pieces of green chillies.

Recipe 3

Chuka was cooked with mutton, as were other greens described before.

Ingredients

1. Chuka, chopped and washed
2. Mutton in pieces
3. Salt
4. Ginger-garlic paste
5. Coriander leaves
6. Oil
7. Red chilli powder or green chillies torn into small pieces

Method

1. Boil the mutton with the salt, ginger-garlic paste and coriander leaves till the meat is soft. There should be enough water to make a stock that will form the gravy. Keep aside.
2. Boil the chopped and washed chuka in a little water.
3. Heat a little oil in a pan. Add red chilli powder or small pieces of green chilli. Mix in the boiled chuka.
4. Add the cooked mutton and soup. Let it come to a boil. Lower heat and simmer a few minutes. Serve.

Recipe 4

This is another way to cook chuka with mutton.

Ingredients

1. Mutton in pieces
2. Salt
3. Ginger-garlic paste
4. Coriander leaves
5. Chuka, chopped and washed
6. Red chilli powder or green chillies torn into small pieces

Method

1. Boil the mutton with salt, ginger-garlic paste and coriander leaves till the meat is soft. There should be enough water to make a stock for soup. Keep aside.
2. Strain the soup into another pot and keep the meat pieces aside to use elsewhere.
3. Boil the chuka in the mutton soup. Add the red chilli powder or small pieces of green chillies.

4. Boil till the chuka is cooked. Serve the soup.

Note: Salt is already added while cooking the mutton, so no extra salt is needed in the vegetable. Similarly, ginger-garlic paste and coriander have already been added. So only red chilli powder or green chillies need to be added. Do not add yesur, peanut crush or other spices that can kill the unique flavour of mutton and chuka.

Shepu-chuka (dill and sorrel greens)

This curry is regularly prepared and relished in villages. The proportion of chuka is lower than that of shepu. A mixture of these two vegetables used to be available in the weekly markets. There are five original recipes for making this combination. The shepu-chuka mixed vegetable curry tastes delicious in any form. The ingredients needed for it are the same and listed under the first basic recipe.

Recipe 1

Ingredients

1. Shepu
2. Chuka
3. Toor dal or mung dal
4. Garlic cloves, crushed
5. Red chilli powder or small pieces of green chillies
6. Peanut crush
7. Salt

Optional

1. Jowar flour
2. Coriander leaves

Method

1. Wash and chop both the vegetables.
2. Add water to a pan and when it starts boiling, add the toor or mung dal.
3. Add the chopped vegetables and crushed garlic cloves. Cook the mixture till the dal is done. This vegetable is prone to overflowing while cooking, so take care to prevent this by reducing the heat and occasionally stirring the dish.
4. If you want to add water to the mixture, always add hot water.
5. When the dal is fully cooked, turn off the flame. Add the red chilli powder, peanut crush and salt. Mix well.
6. Turn on the flame again and cook for five minutes. It is likely to stick to the bottom due to the peanut crush, so be careful and keep stirring it, scraping the bottom of the pot with the spoon. If desired, sprinkle jowar flour in it, stirring all the time to prevent lumps forming, and add coriander leaves.

Recipe 2

Same as above. Add mung dal instead of toor dal.

Recipe 3

Instead of red chilli powder, add small pieces of green chillies while cooking. Or put green chilli chutney at the end.

Recipe 4

If you don't have any pulses in the house, cook both the vegetables with whatever other ingredients are handy from the list above.

Recipe 5

If there are leftovers, the curry is not thrown away. Instead, it is mixed with jowar flour to make a dough and bhakris are made from this. These bhakris don't need any accompaniment.

Palak (spinach)

It is made in the same way as kardi, shepu-chuka or chuka. Besides, if shepu is not available then palak-chuka is made in the same way.

Chakvat (a leafy vegetable)

It is a smooth and tasty vegetable also called 'chandanbatwa', meaning a pouch of sandalwood. The recipe for chuka is followed.

Paat (spring onion leaves)

It is a perennial vegetable cooked in almost every household. Old paat becomes tough and tastes rough. Tender paat becomes soft and messy after cooking. Therefore, a well grown but not too mature paat is preferred.

Onions and garlic grow below the ground in the soil. The leaves don't start immediately: a short stem connects the leaves and the onion. This stem is called gana. When separating paat from onions, the tough outer layers of gana are discarded and only the tender part of it used because the outer gana turns the vegetable insipid. Chop the greens to half the length of your finger. If the paat is very pungent then wash it after chopping and if it is mild, wash it before chopping.

There are several ways of cooking paat, mostly using the ingredients that are listed in Recipe 1. Any changes or replacements are mentioned in the alternative recipes.

Recipe 1

Ingredients

1. Paat, chopped
2. Garlic, crushed
3. Red chilli powder or green chillies
4. Salt
5. Peanut crush
6. Jowar flour for sprinkling (optional)
7. Coriander leaves (if available)

Method

1. Boil water in a pan.
2. Add chopped, washed and cleaned paat to the boiling water.
3. Immediately add the crushed garlic cloves.

4. When the paat is cooked, add the red chilli powder, salt, peanut crush, coriander leaves, a little jowar flour, if using, and cook for five minutes. Serve.

Recipe 2

If there is no peanut crush, add a tempering of oil.

Recipe 3

1. Add toor dal to boiling water.
2. Then add the paat.
3. When the dal is cooked, add all the other ingredients, cover the lid and let it cook on low flame.

Recipe 4

Use mung dal instead of toor dal.

Recipe 5

Use gram dal instead of toor dal. (It tastes good, but many people suffer from bloating and flatulence after eating this.)

Recipe 6

1. Add paat to a thin or thick pithla (curry of besan or soaked gram dal). Alternatively, add gram flour to the paat in Recipe 1. Peanut crush is not added in this recipe.
2. Keep stirring continuously. Let the paat cook on slow fire. If it stays raw, it makes a crunchy sound between the teeth.

Note: Sprinkling jowar flour is optional in all these recipes. Of course, the taste changes if added.

Raw onion and raw paat were eaten as salad along with mutton or any meat curry. This heightened the overall experience to another level. Additionally, lemon and raw methi, served as side dishes, were like the cherry on the cake.

Garlic greens have a very strong, pungent smell. But if you add them in pithla, it enhances the taste.

Mulyachya pananchi bhaji (radish leaves)

Radish leaves have a strong smell. Wash and chop fresh radish leaves and cook according to the recipes for pumpkin leaves, tarvat or tandulja.

Mulyachya shenga (beans of radish)

The seed pods or beans of the radish are called mulyachya shenga or dingarya. They are also very pungent.

Recipe 1

Ingredients

1. Mulyachya shenga
2. Oil
3. Garlic, crushed, or mustard and cumin seeds
4. Red chilli powder
5. Turmeric powder

6. Salt
7. Coriander leaves
8. Peanut crush (optional)

Method

1. Chop the beans, wash them, cook for some time and then drain. This reduces the smell and makes it bearable.
2. Add the oil to a pan and add a tempering of either crushed garlic or mustard seeds and cumin seeds.
3. Add the beans, red chilli powder, turmeric powder, salt and coriander. Add as much water as needed depending on the number of people eating. Some people add peanut crush to make the gravy thicker.

Recipe 2

Follow the above recipe, adding gram dal to the radish beans. Yesur can also be added.

Note: These beans burst between the teeth while eating. They don't merge with other ingredients but retain their own identity and float on the curry.

Mula (radish)

Radish is eaten raw as a salad by itself or as an accompaniment to meals, but it is also cooked as a vegetable dish.

Recipe

Ingredients

1. Radish
2. Oil
3. Mustard seeds
4. Cumin seeds
5. Red chilli powder or green chillies, crushed
6. Salt
7. Turmeric powder
8. Coriander leaves

Method

1. Wash the radish and grate it. Squeeze the grated radish into balls with both hands and drain its juice. This reduces the pungency of the taste. Now break up each ball of grated radish.
2. Add oil to a pan and heat it. Add mustard and cumin seeds. Add red chilli powder or small pieces of green chilli broken up using one's fingernails or crushed chillies, whatever is available. Add grated radish immediately along with salt and turmeric powder.
3. Sauté over low heat. Water is not added in it.
4. Add coriander if available. Let this cook on low flame.

Vangi (brinjal/eggplant)

Only 'katalvangi' (brinjals with thorns) were popular in this region. The long, larger brinjals—the green ones that are used for making a bharit (a smoked and mashed preparation) or the purple longish brinjals—were

served rarely in some functions. These longish brinjals were considered insipid and slimy and so they were not popular. Men and women would smile sheepishly while buying these brinjals, making fun of their size and shape.

People would start consuming brinjals after Sati, that is, the Champashashthi festival. For Sati, Lord Khandoba was offered a naivedya consisting of bajra rodga (thick bhakri), nagdive (lamps of wheat dough), harbharyachi navi bhaji (vegetable curry made from new, fresh chana), vangi or bharit, paat, etc.

The methods of cooking brinjal were not standard, and varied with each household and the woman cooking the vangi. Balvangi, meaning tender, new brinjals, were eaten during forest feasts.

Bharleli vangi (stuffed brinjals)

Stuffed brinjals are prepared in most parts of India using the small, thin brinjals. This is the version made by the Mangs and Mahars and is as delicious as any of its variants.

Recipe 1

Ingredients

1. Peanut crush
2. Yesur
3. Turmeric powder
4. Salt
5. Garlic cloves, finely crushed
6. Coriander leaves
7. Brinjals (renumber)
8. Oil
9. Mustard and cumin seeds or garlic, crushed

Method

1. Mix peanut crush, yesur, turmeric powder, salt, garlic and coriander with a little bit of water and knead it together.
2. Make two longitudinal cuts crossways through the length of the brinjals from the tip to the stalk, making a plus sign.
3. Fill the above mixture lightly inside the brinjals and press gently from the tip upwards to close the cuts and hold in the filling (Filled brinjals should not change their shape but should appear stuffed.)
4. Heat oil in a pan. Make a tempering of either mustard and cumin seeds or crushed garlic.
5. Place the stuffed brinjals gently one by one in the oil. Add a little hot water. The vegetable is ready once the brinjal stalks are cooked.

Note: Some people skip the tempering and place the stuffed brinjals directly in the hot oil.

Recipe 2

Ingredients

1. Use the same ingredients as in the recipe above. Some people use yesur instead of red chilli powder.

Method

1. Instead of stuffing the brinjals, chop them in small pieces. After chopping, they need to be soaked in water to avoid blackening.
2. Temper oil with cumin and mustard seeds or crushed garlic.
3. Add the chopped brinjal and stir.
4. Add the spice mixture and a little water. Mix well. Cover and cook.

If you want to carry this for travel, make a dry version by cooking slowly on low flame. That also tastes delicious.

Bharit (roasted and mashed brinjals)

The round brinjals are used for bharit, a popular preparation made exclusively from brinjals in Marathwada. Still, many people call it ‘vangyacha bharit’. Tautology again! In Marathi dhabas and restaurants, using its Hindi name ‘Baingan ka bharta’ has become a fashion.

Ingredients

1. Brinjals
2. Garlic, minced
3. Salt
4. Red chilli powder or roasted/fried green chillies
5. Coriander leaves
6. Peanut crush (optional)

Method

1. Roast the brinjals directly on the fire. Roast carefully so the skin does not get too charred. Let the brinjals cool down. Only remove the very charred parts of the peel. Leave the rest to give the bharit its unique smoky flavour.
2. Add all the ingredients to the roasted brinjals and mash them all together with the help of the rounded base of a vessel.

Some people fry or roast green chillies, crush them and use that instead of red chilli powder. Some add peanut crush. Some steam the brinjals instead of roasting them.

Dalvanga (dal and brinjal)

There is no fixed proportion of dal to brinjals. Add as much of any of the two as is available and adjust the proportions of the other ingredients accordingly. Turmeric powder, coriander leaves and jowar flour are optional and can be skipped.

Ingredients

1. Toor dal

1. Brinjals
2. Garlic cloves, crushed
3. Red chilli powder
4. Peanut crush
5. Salt

Optional

1. Coriander leaves
2. Turmeric powder
3. Jowar flour.

Method

1. Heat water in a pan. When the water starts boiling, add the toor dal.
2. Add the chopped brinjals and crushed garlic cloves.
3. When the dal is cooked, turn off the flame.
4. Add the other ingredients. Mix well.
5. Let this mixture cook for five minutes on low heat, stirring constantly, else it starts sticking to the bottom due to the peanut crush.
6. Serve. Dalvanga and jowar bhakri is a tasty combination.

Note: Some people use mung dal or daalga instead of toor dal.

Brinjals in meat curry

Cook the meat curry made according to any of the recipes in this book or your own way. When the meat curry is ready, add chopped brinjals and let them cook over low heat. Brinjals and meat pieces together taste delicious in a curry. Sometimes people would cook brinjals in the leftover gravy without meat pieces. Even this used to taste good. Peanut crush is not added to this.

Stale and yellowed brinjals would be dried and stored. These were used for making some of the above recipes, except bharit and stuffed brinjals.

Dal mirchu (dal and green chillies)

Dal mirchu was made in monsoons and winters.

Ingredients

1. Toor dal
2. Green chillies, chopped
3. Garlic, crushed
4. Salt
5. Peanut crush
6. Coriander leaves
7. Turmeric powder
8. Jowar flour (optional)

Method

1. Boil water in a pan. Add dal to the boiling water.
2. Add chopped chillies and crushed garlic cloves.
3. When the dal is cooked, turn off the flame.
4. Add other ingredients. Mix well.
5. Let this mixture cook for five minutes on low heat, stirring constantly, as it starts sticking to the bottom due to the peanut crush.
6. Adding jowar flour is optional.

Mung mirchu (mung dal and green chillies)

Mung mirchu was made in the monsoon, when the new crop of mung was harvested. Although the recipe is similar to that of toor dal mirchu, the taste varies greatly. Mung has many varieties—green mung and yellow mung; dried mung and fresh mung; and roasted mung. Each of these was used in the preparation and each had a different taste. Jowar flour was not used in this recipe. When green chillies were used sparingly, this dal was relished just by itself without bhakri.

Bhopla (pumpkin)

Pumpkins, squashes and gourds come in many varieties, such as dudhi (bottle gourd), mugi (a variant of bottle gourd), devdangar (regular pumpkin), kashiphal (a variant of this), kohala (ash gourd), mugi bhopla, etc. Fully grown pumpkins can be as large as two-and-a-half feet across. These pumpkins all have hard, impermeable shell-like skins and are hollow when they dry out.

Such large pumpkins were dried and used as floats, tied around the waists of children who were learning to swim. Many people who learned to swim with the support of a pumpkin can still be found in villages.

Mugi (or mungi) bhopla tastes like dudhi but is flatter in shape. The base is flat. These pumpkins are dried and used in making musical instruments such as the kingari and the snake-charmer's pungi. Older and bigger pumpkins are specially used to make ektari, a stringed instrument. Kohla (ash gourd) was used instead of live animals in tantric sacrifices. Therefore, Mangs and Mahars were not inclined to consume it. Ash gourd has a white layer of tiny hair. There is a superstition that human hair turns grey if it touches these gourds.

Devdanagar and kashiphal pumpkins were mainly used as a special food by followers of Lord Vishnu in their religious fasting. Moreover, these pumpkins tasted sweetish, which was not a favoured taste in food in this region. Also, these varieties have 'dev' (god) and 'kashi' (a pilgrimage city) in their names, so Mangs and Mahars may have avoided these varieties to rule out any possibility of committing a religious sin.

Shingadi bhopla (dudhi) and mugi bhopla

Shing means horn. This variety is long and curved like cattle's horns. It has a pale-green skin and is milky white inside. Perhaps that's why it's known as dudhi (meaning milky) by white-collar people. The inside of the mugi bhopla is the same, but its skin has darker green stripes of a colour similar to new, fresh mung. Maybe hence the name.

Bhoplyachi bhaji (pumpkin curry)

Any one of the above pumpkins, squashes or gourds was used to make this curry. Only the unripe tender green pumpkins were used, as the ripe ones were thought too sweet. There is a need to peel a pumpkin that is either tender or of medium maturity.

Ingredients

1. Any pumpkin, squash or gourd
2. Peanut crush or niger seeds crush
3. Red chilli powder or green chilli chutney
4. Salt
5. Turmeric powder
6. Coriander leaves
7. Jowar flour (optional)

Method

1. Cut the pumpkin into pieces the size of one-third of a finger—approximately one-inch cubes.
2. Heat water in a large pan. When the water is boiling, add the pumpkin pieces.
3. When the pumpkin is cooked, add the other ingredients.

4. Jowar flour can be added as a thickener.
5. Let it simmer over low heat for five minutes.

The taste differs depending on whether red chilli powder is used or green chilli chutney. It's the same for peanut crush compared to niger seeds crush.

Kohala (ash gourd)

Kohala is also cooked using the above recipe. Soaked gram dal tastes excellent cooked with this vegetable. Occasionally, sandge (balls made of a mixture of vegetables, dals and spices, which are dried and stored, and then eaten either by frying or soaking and cooking) were made using kohala. Sometimes dhapate (savoury bhakri) are also made using kohala.

Ratali (sweet potato)

During religious fasts of the Vaishnav community (those who worship Lord Vishnu), they eat steamed ratali, mashing it in milk and jaggery. Devdangar and kashifal bhoplas are also eaten in a similar way. These two varieties of bhopla are sweetish. Instead of making a curry, these are eaten in a sweet dish when fasting.

People of the Mang and Mahar castes, who had become extra religious due to the influence of the Vaishnav community, would eat all these vegetables on Ashadhi Ekadashi or during their other days of fasting. If milk and jaggery were not available, they would eat the steamed vegetables just by themselves. This tasted fine too.

Dodke (ridge gourd)

There are two types of dodke: one with ridges and the other without. The former is known as dodke (ridge gourd) and the latter is known as parushi dodke or gilke (silk squash). Pregnant women are not supposed to eat parushi dodke because it is believed to cause miscarriage, just like by eating papaya. Perhaps that is why women use this word as a cuss word addressing men. 'Kadu dodkya'—bitter dodkya—is a common cuss word for men.

Dodkyacha kalvan (ridge gourd curry)

The same ingredients, listed in Recipe 1, are used to cook dodke in different ways. There is no need to trim off the external ridges if the dodke are tender.

Recipe 1

Ingredients

1. Tender dodke
2. Oil
3. Garlic, crushed, or mustard and cumin seeds for tempering
4. Yesur
5. Turmeric powder
6. Coriander leaves
7. Salt
8. Peanut crush

Method

1. Cut dodke into medium-sized pieces. Some people steam these pieces and then proceed.
2. Add oil to the pan and add a tempering of either mustard and cumin or crushed garlic.

3. Add the dodke pieces. Mix.
4. Add yesur, turmeric powder, coriander leaves, salt and peanut crush. Toss and mix on low heat.
5. After estimating the number of mouths to be fed, add hot water and let it cook.

Recipe 2

Method

1. Lightly crush the dodke pieces on a stone grinder. Do not mash them up. A light pounding is what is needed.
2. Heat oil in a pan. Add a tempering of garlic or mustard and cumin.
3. Add the slightly pounded dodke. Mix well.
4. Add yesur, turmeric powder, coriander, salt. Sprinkle a little water, lower the heat, cover and let it simmer over low heat. This dry version is also used for travelling.

Recipe 3

Additional ingredients

1. Mung dal or gram dal
2. Onions, chopped

Method

1. Follow either of the recipes as above, adding onion in the tempering.
2. Add dal with the dodke and cook till the dal is done. Add mung dal or gram dal. Add chopped onions too.
3. Peanut crush is optional.

Parushi dodke (silk squash)

Use any of the above recipes for dodke.

Padval (snake gourd)

Padval, a gourd that grows long like a snake, would be included in the Mang and Mahar everyday diet only if someone gave it to them out of their produce. A canopy was created for the vine of padval. A stone was attached to the gourd so that it would grow straight downwards.

Padval was cooked in the same style as dodke or bhopla. Chana dal was added more frequently for this vegetable.

Gavari (guar or cluster beans)

Desi gavar beans are finger-long and covered with fine whitish hairs. It would itch if you touched this hair. Tender beans are plucked before they developed this fur. These beans are cooked in many different ways, using the same ingredients listed in Recipe 1. Its veins get stuck in the teeth while eating, so remove them. Also pinch off both the ends.

Recipe 1

Ingredients

1. Gavar beans
2. Yesur
3. Turmeric powder
4. Salt
5. Peanut crush
6. Coriander leaves

Method

1. Remove the veins or strings from the beans. Wash and cut into half-inch-long pieces.
2. Heat oil in a pan. Add the beans and toss.
3. Lower the heat and add other ingredients. Mix well.
4. Add water after estimating the number of people eating. Cook till the beans are tender.

Recipe 2

A dry variant is made using less water.

Recipe 3

Lightly dry-roast the gavar beans in a tava and then follow either of the above recipes. This curry tastes different because of the roasting.

Recipe 4

Uses the same ingredients, with these additions and replacements:

1. Mustard seeds
2. Cumin seeds
3. Red chilli powder instead of yesur

Method

1. Steam the beans.
2. Heat oil in a pan, throw in the mustard and cumin seeds. When they start spluttering, add the gavar beans.
3. Add red chilli powder instead of yesur. Add all the other ingredients. Mix well.
4. Add as much water as you want and let it cook till done.

Recipe 5

1. Gavar mutton is made by adding gavar beans to regular mutton curry.
2. Peanut crush should not be added to the curry.
3. Also, use red chilli powder instead of yesur when cooking the meat curry.
4. Cook gavar beans in the mutton gravy. If there are extra mutton pieces, add boneless ones along with this.

This dish tastes delicious with chapati or jowar bhakri.

Usavarli sheng, ghevda (common beans)

Usavarli sheng literally means bean next to sugarcane. And indeed, this vine is grown over the small shrubby trees of erand (*Ricinus communis* or castor oil plant) and shevrya (*Sesbania bispinosa*), which are planted close to sugarcane fields. This vine can grow anywhere. It is a main ingredient of bhogichi bhaji—a mixed vegetable curry that is cooked on the eve of Sankrant, a festival that marks the onset of summer.

There are two types of beans. The green and longish beans have kernels that are round and white with a pink tinge. The other beans are flat and short with small bright-green kernels. The kernels are the tastiest part of these beans.

Recipe

Ingredients

1. Common beans
2. Oil
3. Mustard and cumin seeds or crushed garlic cloves for tempering
4. Red chilli powder
5. Peanut crush
6. Turmeric powder
7. Coriander leaves
8. Salt

Method

Same as gavar beans Recipe 1. But this vegetable should not have a watery gravy.

Chavli (black-eyed peas)

Chavlichi sheng (chavli bean) is used as a metaphor for a slim and slender beauty. These long green beans are cooked following a recipe like that for gavar and ghevda. But steaming and draining is not needed in the case of chavli beans.

Patadi (sword beans)

Patadi beans are a brilliant green and about half the length of gulmohar pods, which they somewhat resemble. They are cooked using the same recipes as for other beans. These beans are sweetish. If the beans are old, the inner membrane of the skin becomes tough and inedible.

Koyri (velvet beans)

Koyri beans or velvet beans (*Mucuna pruriens*) are of the size of fingers, round, covered with blackish hairs. These beans are cleaned, sliced, boiled and drained. The rest of the recipe is the same as that of gavar or other beans. It tastes good only if yesur is used.

Shevaga (drumstick or moringa)

Recipe 1

Ingredients

1. Shevaga
2. Oil
3. Crushed garlic cloves or mustard and cumin seeds
4. Yesur

5. Peanut crush
6. Turmeric powder
7. Coriander leaves
8. Salt

Method

1. Cut shevaga into finger-size pieces. Clean and remove the stringy lines and veins. Boil in salt water and then drain the water. You can skip boiling and draining, but if the pods are bitter, this step ensures that the bitterness is gone.
2. Heat oil in a pan and add a tempering of crushed garlic cloves or mustard and cumin seeds. Fry till garlic turns golden or seeds start sputtering.
3. Add the shevaga pieces, yesur, peanut crush, turmeric powder and coriander. Mix well.
4. Add as much hot water as is needed for the number of eaters. Check for salt. Cook on low flame and take off the heat before the pods overcook.

Recipe 2

Same as above but add red chilli powder.

Recipe 3

Make dal-shevga just like dal-vanga. You can use yesur in it.

Hadga (hummingbird tree)

Hadga (*Sesbania grandiflora* or hummingbird tree) is a plant belonging to the drumstick family. The pods are not tasty but the flowers are used to make a vegetable-like preparation.

Recipe

Ingredients

1. Hadga flowers
2. Oil
3. Onions, chopped
4. Yesur
5. Salt
6. Peanut crush

Method

1. Wash and chop the hadga flowers.
2. Heat oil in a tava or heavy-bottomed pan.
3. Add chopped onion when the oil is hot. Stir constantly till the onion breaks down and seems merged with the oil.
4. Add flowers, yesur, salt and peanut crush. Toss well, cover, turn off the flame and let it simmer.

Bhendra (okra)

The word bhendra is masculine. But the elite class calls it bhendi, making it a feminine noun. Vegetables that had to be cooked in a dry form needed a bit more oil, attention and skill. These were cooked either in houses

with fewer people or for meals during travel. Okra is one such vegetable.

It was a disgrace for the lady of the house if the curry or any dish fell short once everyone was seated to dine. It was easier to cook vegetables, the quantum of which could be increased with additional hot water. So, okra was not ideal for home cooking in Mang and Mahar homes because one cannot add water to okra preparations, as the gravy turns slimy.

The main purpose of growing this crop was for its use in the jaggery-making plant. Stems of the okra shrub were used for their chemical properties that facilitated the release of molasses when boiling the cane juice. It also aided in removing all the dust and waste from the remaining juice and the jaggery would become brighter and cleaner.

Recipe

Ingredients

1. Bhendra
2. Oil
3. Green chillies in small pieces or red chilli powder or green chilli chutney
4. Salt
5. Peanut crush
6. Coriander leaves
7. Garlic, crushed
8. Tamarind pulp or curd or lemon juice

Optional for tempering

1. Onions, chopped
2. Garlic, chopped or crushed
3. Mustard seeds
4. Cumin seeds

Method

1. Wash bhendra and then pat them dry with a cloth.
2. Slice them across into small rounds a quarter-inch to half-inch thick, all the same size.
3. Add oil to a frying pan or tava, let it get hot.
4. Reduce the flame and add small pieces of green chillies.
5. Before the chillies start darkening, add okra pieces. Mix well.
6. Add salt, peanut crush, coriander and crushed garlic cloves. Mix.
7. Add a little tamarind pulp, curd or lemon juice. This helps in reducing slime. Mix thoroughly. Cover and simmer over low heat.
8. Slimy bhendra becomes a bit crispy by adding peanut crush.
9. There is no need to add a tempering. Just oil is enough. But if desired, you can fry chopped onion, garlic, and mustard and cumin seeds with the chillies before putting the okra in the pan.

Karli (bitter gourd)

Karli tastes good only when cooked dry or in a thick gravy.

Recipe 1

1. Slice karli across, just like okra or drumsticks, but thinner.

2. Boil in salted water. Drain the slices.
3. Follow the first or second recipe of drumsticks.

Recipe 2

Ingredients

1. Karli
2. Sea salt (crystallized), coarsely ground
3. Oil
4. Mustard seeds
5. Cumin seeds, crushed
6. Onions, chopped
7. Turmeric powder
8. Peanut crush
9. Cumin seeds, crushed
10. Garlic cloves, crushed
11. Yesur
12. Salt
13. Coriander leaves

Method

1. Slit the karli lengthwise and remove seeds. Retain the seeds if they are tender.
2. Mix salt with the tender seeds and allow to rest.
3. Fill the karli with rock salt and put them under hot ash for roasting. They release water due to the salt.
4. Take out the roasted karli, wipe clean and chop into pieces.
5. Rinse the salted seeds, squeeze out extra water. Keep with the karli pieces.
6. Heat oil in a pan or tava and add a tempering of mustard and cumin seeds.
7. Add chopped onion.
8. When the onion turns brown, add karli pieces and seeds.
9. Reduce the heat and add turmeric powder, peanut crush, crushed cumin seeds, crushed garlic cloves, yesur and salt. Taste the karli before adding salt, as the karli will already be salty from the roasting. Toss and sauté it.
10. Add coriander.
11. A dry variant is ready. Alternatively, you can add a little hot water and make a thick gravy.

Recipe 3

Ingredients

1. Karli, roasted as above
2. Yesur
3. Turmeric powder
4. Coriander leaves
5. Peanut crush
6. Tamarind pulp
7. Cumin seeds, crushed
8. Garlic cloves, crushed
9. Salt

Method

1. Take the roasted karli as above.
2. In a bowl, put yesur, turmeric powder, coriander, a lot of peanut crush, a little tamarind pulp if you like a tangy flavour, crushed cumin seeds, crushed garlic cloves and salt to taste. Mix all these to make a thick dough.
3. Fill this masala in the hollowed karlis.
4. Tie each karli with a few windings of thread so the masala doesn't fall out.
5. Heat oil to a pan and fry the stuffed karli on low flame. Sprinkle a little water occasionally to avoid burning. Cover and let them fry and simmer, turning occasionally to brown evenly. That's it!

Chimkura or alu (colocasia)

Since, in this region, the plants in the wild grow on sewage-ridden ground, people here don't eat the roots. Chimkura (colocasia or taro) leaves are used for making alu-vadi.

Recipe 1

Ingredients

1. Chimkura leaves
2. Gram flour
3. Lemon juice or tamarind pulp
4. Turmeric powder
5. Red chilli powder or green chilli chutney
6. Garlic cloves, crushed
7. Coriander leaves
8. Cumin seeds, crushed
9. Oil

Method

1. Mix all the above ingredients except oil, add water and mix well to form a paste.
2. Wash and dry the chimkura leaves.
3. Place a leaf upside-down, cut off the stem and flatten the leaf with a rolling pin.
4. Spread some of the mixture evenly on it.
5. Fold the edges on the sides of the leaves inwards (about an inch) to keep the filling inside. Now fold the leaf from bottom up, using a little batter to stick the folds together.
6. Shallow fry these folded leaves.

Recipe 2

Instead of frying, steam the filled and folded leaves. When they are cooked, separate them from each other with a splash of cold water. Eat them steamed.

Recipe 3

Take the steamed alu-vadi, cut into pieces and shallow fry.

Aadhanvadya (boiled chunks)

Vadya is the common name in villages for nugget-like chunks. Some people call it shengolya.

Ingredients

1. Gram dal flour (besan)
2. Green chilli chutney or red chilli powder or yesur
3. Salt
4. Turmeric powder
5. Crushed garlic cloves
6. Coriander
7. Oil
8. Yesur
9. Peanut crush

Method

1. Mix gram flour with green chilli chutney or red chilli powder or yesur, turmeric powder, crushed garlic cloves, salt and coriander.
2. Knead it like wheat flour and keep it aside.
3. Add oil to a pan and heat it.
4. Add two cloves of crushed garlic. When the garlic turns golden brown, add water.
5. When the water starts to boil, reduce the heat and add yesur, peanut crush, coriander and salt.
6. Take the gram flour dough, knead small vadya or balls with your palms and drop them in the boiling masala water.
7. Curry is ready when the vadya are cooked.

Thapvadya

Also known as paatvadya. These are mainly made during Mhal, i.e., a fortnight remembering one's ancestors and also during Yel Amavasya (new moon night that falls in the month of January).

Ingredients

1. Coarsely ground gram dal flour
2. Green chilli chutney
3. Turmeric powder
4. Coriander leaves
5. Salt
6. Garlic cloves, minced
7. Oil
8. Mustard seeds
9. Cumin seeds

Method

1. Mix together gram dal flour, green chilli chutney, turmeric, coriander, salt and garlic.
2. Add water and mix it well. It should be thicker than dosa batter.
3. Heat oil in a pan, give a tempering of mustard–cumin seeds.
4. Reduce the heat and add the mixture. Keep stirring and do not let the mixture stick to the bottom. Cover and let it simmer.
5. As soon as the flour is cooked, spread it in a plate or a wider pan. Wet palms with cold water pat it flat immediately.
6. When the thinly spread-out mixture cools down, cut into diamond shaped pieces.

Kadi (tempered buttermilk)

Kadi for the villagers is what urbanites referred to as kadhi. When buttermilk arrived from the landlord's mansion, it was eaten by soaking crushed fresh bhakri or dried jowar bhakri in it with a little salt. But sometimes kadi was made in these households too.

Recipe 1

Ingredients

1. Buttermilk
2. Turmeric powder
3. Red chilli powder or green chilli chutney
4. Salt
5. Coriander leaves
6. Gram or jowar flour
7. Garlic, crushed
8. Oil
9. Mustard seeds
10. Cumin seeds

Method

1. Take buttermilk in a pan. Add turmeric powder, red chilli powder or green chilli chutney, salt and coriander and mix.
2. If desired, add a little jowar or gram flour to thicken, and crushed garlic cloves for flavour. Mix it well.
3. Heat oil in a kadhai or pan. Make a tempering of mustard and cumin seeds or crushed garlic.
4. Add the buttermilk mixture and boil. Kadi is ready.

Recipe 2

If there are pieces of dried bhakri in the house, add those along with peanut crush to the above kadi and let the pieces cook.

Leftover kadi was kept in a bowl or a pan. This cold kadi was consumed for the next couple of days. This would make one mildly drowsy and sluggish.

Kanya (grains)

There were some popular phrases based on this: 'I'm not hungry, I'm good. Is there some taak-kanya or some other food?' and 'Rich and cool, scrapes the dustbin like a fool.'

They refer to those who keep refusing the offered food out of pride or sometimes for no particular reason, when in fact they are hungry and craving it. And later they settle for something like taak-kanya, which is not commonly fancied.

Ingredients

1. Jowar grains
2. Salt

If available

1. Garlic, crushed
2. Red chilli powder
3. Coriander leaves
4. Buttermilk

Method

1. Wash jowar in water, drain and grind lightly. It used to be ground in the stone grinder.
2. Place a panful of water on the fire.
3. When the water is boiling, add the slightly ground jowar grains along with salt.
4. When it is cooked tender, it is ready to eat.
5. To improve flavour, add crushed garlic, coriander, red chilli powder or any other seasoning, and buttermilk, if available.

A hungry person would eat the plain kanya from a plate or sometimes simply gulp it down like a soup if it was watery.

Sanja (jowar porridge)

Fresh jowar grain cooked like rice is called sanja. It was made like kanya but it was not watery. It was always made after the harvest. The Dhavara feast was organized after harvest during April–May. Goats would be sacrificed and delicious barbat curry was made. All the invitees would be served this sanja along with barbat. This combination worked very well. Therefore, in many religious festivals sanja was cooked instead of regular rice.

Ghugarya (mixed grains)

This was mostly prepared for the children's naming ceremony. After the name of the child was declared, ghugarya were distributed to the guests. When a young boy or a girl starts behaving in an arrogant manner, old folks would tease them, saying, 'I have eaten ghugarya at your naming ceremony.'

Ingredients

1. Fresh jowar grains
2. Leftover or dried wheat
3. Chana (Bengal gram)
4. Peanuts

Method

1. Mix in any proportion and cook in boiling water with salt to taste.
2. When the grains are soft, ghugarya is ready. Serve immediately. This is eaten hot and fresh.

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Chapati, puran poli and more

In this region, poli or polya is short for puran poli, which is a delicacy made using wheat, chana dal and jaggery. Poli can also refer to andyachi poli, meaning egg omelette. In olden times, the people's main diet was bhakris made of jowar and bajra. Chapati, poli and puran poli were not prepared on a daily basis; they were reserved for special occasions or for special guests.

Chapati

Chapati is a wheat roti (unleavened flatbread). It is a commonly used word by most Marathi-speaking people. Brahmins, however, refer to chapati as poli (plural: polya). In Marathwada, wheat was not a part of the daily diet. To make chapatis, wheat is ground and the flour is sieved. The flour is then kneaded with sufficient water and salt to taste. This dough has to be kept aside for a while. Then the chapatis are rolled out and baked on a heated tava.

While bhakri were made by flattening the bread with the hands, chapatis and puran polis needed pol-pat and belan, often borrowed from a neighbour, or the woman was creative with what she had in the kitchen. Making these breads was invariably women's work. This is the recipe for special chapatis, which in other parts of India might be called parathas.

Ingredients

1. Whole-wheat flour
2. Salt
3. Water
4. Oil

Method

1. Mix flour with a little salt, and use water to make a smooth, soft, elastic dough. Cover and let it rest for a half hour.
2. Put tava on stove to heat up.
3. Take a small portion of dough, about the size of a large laddoo or lime, and roll into a ball.
4. Flatten it with your hands till it is half the size of the final chapati.
5. Dip fingers in oil and apply on the surface, fold in half. Apply oil on top of the folded half and fold into quarters. The idea is to make chapatis with layers.
6. Dust this folded dough with flour and roll out into a large, thin, round chapati. Use the rolling pin with a light hand.
7. Bake the chapati on a hot tava, turning it occasionally. When it starts puffing up and developing light-brown spots, dip fingers in oil (if there is enough) and dab it over the surface and flip the chapati. Repeat on the new surface. This is minimal oil; it just helps make softer and better cooked chapati.
8. While this chapati is cooking, roll out the next one.

9. Cook till both sides are done, showing bright brown spots from the roasting. Take off tava, and bake the next chapati.

There were other ways to make chapatis as well. Some would roll a portion of dough into a long cylinder and flatten it, apply oil and roll it up into a ball. Then they rolled it out to make the chapati. Another method was to make two balls of different sizes, stuff the smaller one into the bigger one, and roll it out.

Puran poli

Ingredients

1. Gram dal
2. Wheat flour
3. Salt
4. Jaggery
5. Oil
6. Fennel seeds, powdered
7. Dry ginger powder

Method

1. Boil water in a pan. Add gram dal to it. Cover and let it cook.
2. Check occasionally and add hot water, if needed.
3. In the meantime, make a soft dough of wheat flour with water and salt. Keep it aside.
4. The dal is considered fully cooked when it breaks easily when pressed between the thumb and index finger.
5. When the cooked dal is taken off the stove, strain the water into another pan. Use a colander or loosely woven cloth.
6. Put the dry, cooked dal in a bowl. Take some of the dal, add it to the reserved dal-water and keep aside. This will be used to make yelavanachi amti.
7. Mix the cooked and dried dal with finely chopped jaggery, salt, fennel powder and ginger powder.
8. Grind this mixture in a mixer-grinder or the traditional paata-varvanta (manual stone grinder). It must be finely ground. Not a single grain of dal must be left. This mixture is called puran. Keep it in a bowl. Heat up the tava.
9. Take a portion of the prepared dough, roll it into a ball and flatten it slightly. Put a large spoonful of puran in it and close it up. Pinch the edges together so there are no cracks or openings. Gently roll it between your palms to form a smooth ball.
10. Dust with flour and roll it out using very light pressure on the rolling pin. This rolling particularly required skill and practice. Even expert chefs' cooking skills are put to test while making puran poli, so do not be discouraged if the first attempts fail.
11. Place the rolled-out puran poli on the hot tava. Reduce and raise the heat as required, so the puran poli does not burn but cooks perfectly.
12. Abundant use of oil makes the polis soft, moist and delicious. Such polis are called telchya and the ones made using less oil are called polya.

In the mansions of landlords, telchyas were prepared for the household and polyas were made for the contracted labourers.

In olden times, everything was crushed or finely ground on the paata-varvanta. Its daily use was to grind green chillies and other masalas. So it had to be cleaned and washed thoroughly before using it for sweet items. The front half part of the paata (the stone) was kept on a bamboo winnower or a clean cloth to collect any puran that fell off the stone. Children love to eat balls of puran.

Yelvanyachi amti

Rice was also cooked on special feast days when puran polis were made. Yelvanachi amti was the savoury accompaniment for rice, and a good way to use up the leftover dal water. Some people like to eat yelvanachi amti with puran poli.

Ingredients

1. Cooked gram dal and water saved from boiling dal for puran
2. Yesur
3. Salt
4. Oil
5. Garlic, crushed
6. Coriander powder, if available

Method

1. Mix yesur and salt in the dal-and-water mixture.
2. Add oil to a hot pan. Add crushed garlic cloves.
3. Add the watery yesur-dal mixture before the garlic cloves start burning. Add coriander if available. Let it come to a boil. The yelvanachi amti is ready.

Gulavani

The traditional way of eating puran poli is to mix and mash it with milk. But milk was rarely available for Mangs and Mahars. Gulavani was made as a replacement.

Ingredients

1. Water
2. Jaggery
3. Salt
4. Dry ginger powder, if available and desired

Method

1. Add water to a pan based on the number of mouths to be fed in the house. Bring to boil.
2. Add as much jaggery as you want.
3. Add salt to taste and dry ginger powder if available and if you like it.
4. Simmer for a while.

Rice

In this region, rice was cooked only for festivals, and especially if puran polis were made. Roughly twelve festivals were celebrated every year. This means rice was cooked twelve times during the year. One kilogram of rice would suffice a family of ten at a time. They would not consume more than a kilogram per head per year.

Ingredients

1. 1 part rice
2. 2½–3 parts water (for boiling)

3. Salt

Method

1. Measure the rice by cup or glass. (You will use the same vessel to measure the water in which you boil the rice.) Pick out and remove any stones, dust and so on, and clean it well. Wash the rice.
2. Put the measured water in a pan. Turn heat to high. Cover the pan. Let it come to a boil. Uncover.
3. Add salt to taste. Add the washed rice.
4. Let it boil uncovered till the water is mostly absorbed and none covering the rice, which will be half-cooked by this time.
5. Now cover tightly and lower the heat
6. Let it cook slowly for another 10–15 minutes or till the rice is tender. Serve.

Note: New rice (from a recent harvest) is sticky when cooked, while old rice (from the previous year's crop or older) is dry and fluffy.

In villages, doors were kept open while having meals. There was a belief that Goddess Laxmi would get upset if the doors are closed while eating. Dogs would gather outside homes during meal times. Morsels would be thrown for them.

A meal including puran poli was considered special. It was never had in haste. Meals were served in pangats (rows) for everyone in a neat and tidy way. Puran poli was served in a plate along with gulavani poured over it. Yelavanyachi amti with rice was served in a separate bowl. Some fried items such as kuravdya, if available, were served in this bowl too. Older people would take a sip of amti while eating the crushed puran poli. Amti and rice was eaten last. To eat puran poli with milk was a luxury. Some people would pour water in their plate, mash jaggery into it and then crush puran polis into this freshly made gulavani.

Ras (juice)

'Ras' means juice. Any juice. But it refers to mango juice in this region.

Ingredients

1. Ripe, juicy mangoes
2. Jaggery
3. Salt

Method

1. Wash mangoes. Soften them by pressing them gently all over, with a thumb placed at the stalk end.
2. When the entire fruit feels pulpy, pluck off the stalk. Squeeze out and discard the first few drops that contain a thin resin.
3. Now squeeze out the good juice into a pan.
4. Repeat with all the mangoes.
5. In another pan, take some fresh water and wash the mango skins in it to extract remaining traces of mango pulp. Add this to the pan of mango juice.
6. Similarly wash the mango seeds and add the water to the pan of juice.
7. Add more water, depending upon the number of mouths to be fed.
8. Add crushed jaggery and salt, mix well till jaggery dissolves completely. Serve.

In summer, when puran polis were made, they were usually served with ras instead of gulavani. Ras was also eaten along with botve (a kind of noodles) or rice or chapati. Also, special dhirdis (pancakes) were also made to eat along with ras.

Dhirdi (jowar pancake)

Dhirdi is a deceptively simple recipe. Skill is needed to spread the pancake batter evenly and smoothly, and to prevent it sticking to the tava or breaking up. A woman who could make good dhirdis was called sugran—an excellent chef.

Ingredients

1. Jowar flour
2. Cumin seeds
3. Garlic, minced
4. Salt

Method

1. Mix cumin seeds and garlic in jowar flour.
2. Add salt and water to the mixture. It should have a pancake batter consistency—thick enough to coat the back of a spoon.
3. Cut half an onion and stick a turati stem (turati is the toor dal shrub) in it. You can also stick a fork into the onion half—this is an implement to oil the pan.
4. Heat a tava over medium flame.
5. Oil the tava with the flat side of this onion and spread the jowar batter using a small pot or a ladle.
6. Cover the cooking pancake for a while. When the bottom side is done, turn pancake over and let it cook on the other side.

Jaggery

Jaggery was the primary sweetening agent for all sweet dishes in this region. Sweets were not made every day. They were reserved only for festive seasons. Adding a little bit jaggery to every savoury preparation to balance tastes is a common practice amongst upper castes. The Mangs and Mahars would work in jaggery-making units but their women never thought of adding jaggery to their daily preparations. There were jaggery-making units in most villages.

The process of squeezing sugarcane for fresh juice, keeping the juice boiling and making solid jaggery would go on day and night. The workers would add the juice of okra plant as a chemical agent to separate molasses, which was known as mali in the local lingo till the sugar factories popularized the term molasses. Molasses would float on the boiling juice like cream on milk.

Ethanol is produced from molasses, and then alcohol is made from ethanol. Jaggery becomes darker if you don't remove molasses. Such dirty jaggery wouldn't fetch a good price. Spoiled jaggery was, however, useful for people making alcohol. People would also make alcohol out of molasses. Some workers would carry a little bit of the boiled juice (liquid jaggery) back home and store it. It was almost indistinguishable from honey. Some people would soak bhakri in the liquid jaggery and eat it. Some would also add goat milk to this and make a tasty and healthy porridge.

Maliche sandage (fried vadya made from molasses)

Sandage is usually a savoury preparation made mixing dals, vegetables and spice and forming little balls of the mixture. This is dried and stored, and fried or cooked in gravies. However, another type of sweetish sandage were made using 'good quality' molasses. Women would mix coarsely ground bajra or jowar, liquid jaggery and molasses. These sandage tasted delicious as an independent preparation. Just like alcohol, they would never go bad.

Aalan

Aalan is a quick sweet dish.

Ingredients

1. Wheat flour
2. Jaggery
3. Salt
4. Fennel seeds or cardamom (if available)

Method

1. Dry roast the wheat flour on low heat.
2. Put water as required in a separate pan and let it boil.
3. Add jaggery to the boiling water. Add salt to taste.
4. Reduce the flame and sprinkle the roasted flour in this jaggery water, stirring constantly to avoid lumps.
5. Add finely crushed fennel seeds or cardamom and continue cooking.
6. Wheat flour sticks to the pot easily, so it has to be stirred continuously, scraping the bottom and sides of the pot. Cook till it tastes done.

Serve this aalan with chapati. It is a kind of sweet pithla.

Diwali faral

Diwali faral was the sweet and savoury feast prepared during the festival of Diwali. An elaborate platter of sweets and savoury preparations were made in the households of upper castes. The Mangs and Mahars also made snacks and sweets with whatever was available and affordable. Although the names were the same, the ingredients, recipes and taste hugely differed.

Gole or laddoo (sweet balls)

Laddoos were commonly called gole in Marathwada. Gole of bundi, nukti or rava were popular. Bundi or nukti (sweet droplets of gram dal) consumed a lot of oil and sugar, so no one bothered to make these. But if they did, they followed the same recipe as the upper castes, which is given below.

Ingredients

1. Gram dal flour
2. Turmeric powder (optional)
3. Oil
4. Sugar
5. Cardamom, powdered (if available)

Method

1. Add water to the gram flour and knead it well. (Add turmeric to the gram flour for colour, if desired.) The dough must be very firm.
2. Put oil in a big pan. Heat it.
3. Shevga is a machine to make sev (noodles). Not every house had it. It would often be borrowed from someone. Use this machine and drop the sev of desired thickness in the hot oil. Fry the sev

well.
4. Crush the fried noodles.
5. Put water in a separate large pan, add sugar in it and let it boil. If available, add cardamom powder. Keep an eye on it while cooking.
6. When it starts becoming sticky, immediately take the pan off the heat and add the crushed sev. Mix it well and roll into balls while the mixture is hot. The size of these balls varies according to the size of the palms of the people making them.

Garyache gole

Gara means semolina. Urban people call it rava. All-purpose flour was called maida by urban people and soji by villagers. Wheat was soaked, drained and dried. Then it was ground. Separate sieves, coarse and fine, were used to collect semolina and maida respectively.

Ingredients

1. Semolina
2. Oil
3. Sugar
4. Cardamom powder

Method

1. Roast semolina lightly, adding oil.
2. Make sugar syrup using the method described in bundi gole above.
3. Add roasted semolina to this syrup, mix well, and make balls. These balls become quite tough and hard.

Another method is used for making softer balls.

1. Roast semolina, using a little oil.
2. Add sugar and cardamom powder to roasted semolina. Stir this mixture in the hot pan.
3. Add a little milk and roll them into balls.

Karanjya (fried sweet dumplings)

Some people call it kanavale. Kan means ears. Perhaps that is why this name is used to describe this ear-shaped dish. Two types of karanjya were made—of semolina and of sesame seeds.

Garyachya karanjya

These are the karanjya made of semolina.

Ingredients

1. Semolina
2. Oil
3. Grated dry coconut
4. Cardamom
5. Sugar
6. Salt to taste
7. All-purpose flour or wheat flour

Method

1. Lightly roast semolina. Add a little oil while roasting.
2. Add grated coconut, cardamom and sugar and mix them well in this roasted rava. Sweet saran (stuffing) is ready.
3. Add salt to taste to the all-purpose flour or wheat flour and knead it well. This dough should be neither too tight nor too soft.
4. Make small balls and flatten them. Place some sweet saran in each flat roti, fold it and seal it. Expert men and women would make a design while closing the roti. It is called murad ghalane, meaning to twist and seal. (The popular phrase 'manaala murad ghalane' suggests how one has to suppress one's feelings and seal all desires at times.)
5. Once all the sealed karanjya are ready, deep fry them in hot oil.

Tilachya karanjya

These karanjya are made with sesame seeds.

Ingredients

1. Sesame seeds
2. Jaggery
3. All-purpose flour or wheat flour
4. Oil
5. Salt

Method

1. Take roasted sesame seeds and jaggery in equal proportions.
2. Pound them well in a stone grinder, adding salt to taste. Sweet saran is ready.
3. These are to be prepared the same way as Garyachya karanjya, as explained in the previous page. Follow its steps 3 and 4 for the cover. Replace its semolina with sesame seeds for the stuffing.

Sev or shev

Sev or shev are a popular savoury snack, and part of the Diwali faral.

Ingredients

1. Gram dal flour (besan)
2. Red chilli powder
3. Salt
4. Turmeric powder
5. Oil

Method

1. Add red chilli powder, salt and turmeric powder to the gram dal flour. Mix it well, and make a firm dough.
2. Heat oil in a kadhai or large shallow pan.
3. Make noodles using the shevga machine and deep fry.

Anarse

This was a delicacy that needed a lot of time, money and effort. But women from the Mang and Mahar community would figure out the recipe from upper-caste women and try and make it in their own experimental way.

Ingredients

1. Rice
2. Jaggery or sugar
3. Poppy seeds
4. Oil

Method

1. Soak rice for two to three days, changing the water every 24 hours.
2. Drain, add jaggery or sugar, knead this to make a firm dough.
3. Make small balls, flatten them by patting.
4. Press poppy seeds on both sides and shallow fry.

Salty snacks of jowar and besan

Kodbali, chakulya, dhapati and katikondbali are all snacks made using the same basic raw materials described below.

Ingredients

1. 2 parts jowar flour
2. 1½ parts besan (gram dal flour)
3. ½ part wheat flour
4. Turmeric powder
5. Salt
6. Green chilli chutney
7. Garlic, minced
8. Coriander
9. Oil
10. Cumin seeds, coarsely crushed

Method

Add water to the above mixture and make a dough.

Chakulya

1. Take small portions of this dough. Tap and flatten on palms and place on the hot tava.
2. Make a hole in the centre of each chakuli and add oil. Shallow fry from both sides and serve.

Dhapati

1. Spread a thin wet cloth on the rolling board. Pat and flatten the dough on this.
2. Make a small hole in the centre and 4–5 holes around it.
3. Place on the hot tava. Shallow fry from both sides and serve.

Kodbali or kondbali

1. Take a piece of dough and roll into a thick, large noodle about 5 inches long. Join its ends and make a circle the size of a bracelet. Repeat with the rest of the dough.
2. Shallow fry from both sides and serve.

Katikondbali

1. Heat a pan of oil.
2. Put the dough in a shevga machine fitted with a disc that has star-shaped apertures.
3. Press the dough through into the hot oil in a spiral shape. The resultant fried snack resembles chakli or murukku and is covered in little spikes that look like thorns. Hence the name katikondbali, kati meaning thorns. As the katikondbali are deep fried, they keep for many days. The elite class refers to them as ‘chakalya’.

Ukad kondbali (steamed kondbali)

Ukad kondbali was not made as a special delicacy. It was made during times of scarcity of flours, grains and vegetables. All available flours and condiments were mixed. Mostly jowar flour, gram dal flour and wheat flour were used.

Ingredients

1. Jowar flour
2. Gram dal flour
3. Wheat flour
4. Any other flour available
5. Mustard and cumin seeds
6. Chillies
7. Salt to taste

Method

1. Mix the flours and knead into a firm dough.
2. Heat oil in a pan and add mustard and cumin seeds, and chillies for tempering.
3. Pour in plenty of hot water. Add salt to taste. While waiting for it to come to a boil start making the dough shapes.
4. Take pieces of dough and roll between the palms to form thick noodles about 5-inches long. Join their ends to form bracelet-like rings.
5. Drop them in the boiling water. They tend to stick to each other when getting boiled.
6. When cooked, take the rings out of the pan and sprinkle a little cold water on them and cover. They can be separated now.
7. Serve with the liquid in which they were boiled. The kondbali are mashed into the liquid and eaten.

Kadakni

The Navaratra festival (nine nights) celebrates new creations and new crops, and goddesses are worshipped. As a part of the ritual, wheat seeds are sowed in a pack of soil and allowed to grow for the next nine days. This is called ‘*ghat basavne*’—to set a ghat. Every day a new garland is made and hung above this ghat. Kadakni is woven into these garlands on one or more days during this festival and hung along with other decorations. Kadakni is an extra-hard delicacy made using wheat flour or white all-purpose flour (maida). It is made available for everyone to eat only on the tenth day, that is, Dasara. It rarely tastes as good any other time of the year as it does during this festival.

Shira

Homemade semolina was used for making shira.

Ingredients

1. Oil
2. Sugar
3. Semolina

If available

1. Cardamom
2. Milk

Method

1. Add oil to a pan. Add water and sugar. If available, add cardamom and milk.
2. When this mixture starts boiling, sprinkle semolina and keep stirring to avoid forming of lumps. Allow it to cook on a low flame till the mixture is thick and semolina grains are soft and moist.

Kheer and lapshi

Wheat was soaked, dried and pounded for kheer and lapchi. This is the recipe for kheer.

Ingredients

1. Oil
2. Jaggery
3. Pounded wheat

If available

1. Coconut pieces
2. Cardamom

Method

1. Heat oil. Add water and jaggery.
2. If available, add coconut pieces and cardamom.
3. Add the pounded wheat. It takes a long time to cook. The wheat tends to stick to the pot immediately, so it has to be stirred continuously.

Lapshi is also made in a similar way. But lapshi is watery and thinner than kheer. Lapshi is made on a large scale for offering as prasad during big festivals and puja.

Tandlachi kheer

Here rice is used instead of wheat but made just like wheat kheer. For this, sugar, milk and cardamom are used instead of jaggery and water.

Shikaran

It was a quick-fix sweet dish to be made when in a hurry or when unexpected guests arrived. The final output looks like phlegm. Naak shinkarne means blowing nose. Perhaps that's why the name shikaran. When you have plenty of bananas or when they are too ripe, make shikaran.

Ingredients

1. Overripe bananas
2. Sugar
3. Milk

Method

1. Peel and mash bananas.
2. Add sugar and milk and mix everything well.

It tastes good with chapatis. If it is kept for too long, it starts turning black.

Kanavle

Kanavle were made for Nagpanchami, a festival when cobra snakes are worshipped. These are different from karanjya. Gram dal sweet saran is stuffed into flattened wheat flour dough. Then they are sealed and steamed. Puffed jowar is also made for Nagpanchami for the puja of anthills where snakes reside.

Dhonde

Dhondes were prepared for sons-in-law in the adhik mahina, that is, an extra month in the Hindu calendar that is added to align the lunar and solar calendars. Sweet puran (stuffing of jaggery and gram dal) is filled into the wheat flour dough and these balls are deep-fried. A few enthusiastic mothers-in-law would keep a Surti rupee coin (from the mint in Surat city) in one of the dhonde. The daughter was considered lucky if the son-in-law picked this dhonda.

Sanjurachya polya

Hurda or fresh unripe wheat grains were used for making sanjura. If fresh hurda was not available, wheat was soaked, dried and roasted. The hurda or the processed wheat was then ground coarsely.

Ingredients

1. Hurda or processed wheat, ground coarsely
2. Jaggery
3. Dry ginger powder
4. Fennel seeds, powdered
5. Poli dough

Method

1. Dissolve jaggery in water.
2. Soak ground wheat in jaggery water for over two hours.
3. Mix dry ginger powder and fennel seeds powder into it. This is called sanjura.
4. Use as a stuffing instead of puran to make stuffed wheat chapatis.
5. Roast on tava with oil in the same way as puran poli.

These sanjuryachya polya were made on many occasions such as when a bride came to her new home for the first time, during her first few visits to and from her mother's home after the wedding, and during her first in the month of Shravan. All these visits were considered special and sanjuryachya polya were made to celebrate these special events.

Nagdive and rodge

Sati, or Champashashthi, a festival devoted to Lord Khandoba was celebrated with bajra nagdive and rodge (pronounced 'road-gay') as naivedya (holy food). Bajra was pounded and a fine dough was made with its flour, adding water and salt. Damru-shaped (a musical instrument that resembles an hourglass) nagdive (lamps) were made from half of this dough. Then they were steamed in the same way as kanavale. Nagdive, filled with oil, were lit during the puja by adding oil.

The other half of the dough was used for making rodge (thick bhakris). They were flattened between the palms and were roasted on a pan until slightly burnt. Rodge were served with bharit of new brinjals, along with new spring onions and the fresh thick curry of chana leaves.

Chaturmas was observed till Champashashthi and brinjal was one of the banned food items, which was allowed to be consumed only from this day onwards. They would eat all this in the morning, including the extinguished nagdive. This day was special. The combined taste of nagdive, bharit, rodge and chana leaves curry never tasted the same on other days as it did on this day.

Nagdive were steamed on a fire fuelled by gavlani made from cow dung. The making of gavlani (symbolic statues of milkmaids made from cow dung) would start from Diwali. They would go on increasing with a new circle of fresh statues every day. Each statue was regarded as a milkmaid. Statues of Krishna and his best friend Pendya were also made. A Govardhana (sacred mountain) of dung was made on the day of Dhanatrayodashi (a day worshipping wealth). On this day, gavlani were not made. Five Pandavas were made on the fifth day of Diwali. On this day, wheat noodles were cooked in milk near these gavlani. Deliberately letting the milk boil over was an essential part of this ritual. Instead of throwing away these gavlani, they kept them on the roof of the house or somewhere else to dry and were used as fuel a month later on Champashashti specifically to cook nagdive.

Kotmiriche mutke

Coriander seeds were sown during the kharif season or the seeds that were spread by the previous year's rainwater would sprout in the monsoon. When these plants flowered, a strong fragrance would linger in the atmosphere that reminded everyone of meat curries. When there were enough coriander leaves at home, mutke (balls) were planned.

Ingredients

1. Coriander leaves
2. 1 part jowar
3. ¾ part gram flour
4. ½ part soaked gram dal
5. ¼ part wheat flour
6. Green chilli chutney or red chilli powder
7. Salt
8. Water
9. Garlic cloves, crushed

Method

1. Mix all the above ingredients well, like a chapati dough.

2. Make balls by shaping them in the fist. The fist is called muth in Marathi. The name mutke may have its connection with this technique of shaping the balls in the fist.
3. Pour water one inch deep in a large pan. Now put in a thick layer of dry grass, straw, dry sugarcane stalks or any such dry material to make a bed for the mutke to rest on without touching the water. Cover the pan.
4. Put the pan on the stove and let the water come to a boil.
5. Lay out the mutke on the straw bed, cover the pan again. Steam the mutke till they are done.
6. Once they are cooked, sprinkle some cold water on them, cover for a few minutes. This helps unstick the mutke.
7. Traditionally they were not fried as oil was expensive. Now the steamed mutke are fried before serving or they are either eaten steamed in the old way.

Dal-phala or varan-phala (wheat dumplings cooked in dal)

Make small chunks of wheat dough. Cook toor dal and drop these chunks into it. Let them cook. Some people would eat this along with sugar.

Different types of bhaat (rice)

When you say ‘bhaat’ or ‘rice’, one imagines the usual (white or yellowish or red) rice cooked using rice grains. However, in villages any porridge-like or boiled preparations made using any grains or pasta is also called bhaat (rice).

During their leisure time in summers, women would make different types of wheat pasta such as shevaya (regular long and thin noodles), botave (thick, the length of one-third of a finger), nakulya (tiny chunks pressed with the thumbnails, having nail imprints) and fanulya (similar to nakulya but instead of nail imprints these would be pressed and made flatter).

Bhagar (samo rice or barnyard millet) and raala (foxtail millet), especially black raala were also grown in fields. These too would be cooked and called bhaat.

Chutneys

1. **Kharda**: After completing the task of roasting all bhakris, green chillies were put on the hot tava. A little oil was also added, if available, and the chillies were char-cooked. The tava was covered to avoid any mishaps due to the bursting of chillies. Then the tava was taken off the fire and salt granules, garlic cloves and coriander were added. The mixture was pounded on the tava itself, using a vessel with a heavy base. This particular way of pounding coarsely is called kharadne in Marathi. Hence the name kharda. Some people would also add roasted peanuts. The half-crushed peanuts would taste delicious in the kharda when it was eaten with bhakri, for which this chutney was made.

Ingredients

1. Roasted peanuts (optional)
2. Oil
3. Green chillies, whole
4. Salt
5. Garlic cloves
6. Coriander leaves

Method

1. After roasting bhakris, roast peanuts on the hot tava and remove.
2. Add a little oil and fry whole green chillies.

3. Add salt, garlic, coriander, peanuts and pound them roughly with a heavy-bottomed vessel.

2. **Thecha**: The above mixture, when ground in a stone grinder (stone grinding is called thechane in Marathi) is known as thecha. Kharda and thecha both are used as accompaniments for bhakri during travel.
3. **Green chilli chutney**: When green chillies were abundant or cheap, they were finely ground and stored as an alternative to red chilli powder. Dalits would often eat this as a quick chutney along with bhakri and hence invariably salt was added to this paste in their households.
4. **Kuravlelya mirchya**: For using green chillies in any preparation, they were broken into pieces using one's fingernails. Sometimes if a lot were to be used, the vili (a cutting instrument) was used.
5. **Lal tikhat (red chilli powder or red chutney)**: Dried red chillies were dried once again in sunlight to remove any moisture that remained. Their stalks were removed. Then they were pounded in a stone grinder, sieved a couple of times and the red chutney powder would be ready. Salt was added to make it possible to use this as a dry chutney accompaniment for bhakri at times. If oil was used for roasting, the there was less floating powder from the chillies while being pounded, reducing the usual resultant coughing and reddening of eyes. But it also consumed more time. Women would easily spend half a day making this powder.
6. **Yesur**: According to some people, its references are also found in Ayurveda. Yesur has become an integral part of the kitchen of the majority of people from this region, especially in their non-vegetarian diet. At times when no other vegetable or dal was available, red chilli powder was mixed with water or oil to use as an accompaniment with bhakri. Yesur was also used in a similar way. Although adding salt in the powder would make it easier to use it as such, it would also reduce the shelf life of this mixture to three months. Some women, therefore, avoided adding salt.

These days, the ingredients of yesur include spices and coconut which are produced in the Konkan area (coastal Maharashtra) and need to be transported to this region. It must have taken many centuries for the recipe to evolve, as transportation facilities improved. The chilli was introduced to India by the Portuguese. Perhaps the spices produced near the coast began to be transported to this region along with chillies after the sixteenth century.

It is possible that the original recipe of yesur included only a few things such as onions, coriander seeds and so on. All the other spices and condiments may have gotten added later. The following is the recipe for yesur, which has been prevalent for the past three to four decades:

Ingredients

1. 1 kg dried red chillies
2. ½ kg onion
3. ¼ kg coriander seeds
4. 100 g dry coconut
5. 10–15 gm each of black pepper, cloves, black cardamom, rock flower, star anise, nagkesar (rose chestnut), cinnamon, caraway seeds, bay leaf
6. Salt to taste
7. Oil

Optional

1. Cumin seeds
2. Fennel seeds
3. Sesame seeds

Spice vendors in the weekly markets give all these ingredients in the correct proportion when asked to give everything needed for one kilo of dry chilli yesur.

Method

1. Finely slice onions lengthwise and dry under the sun for at least eight to fifteen days before making yesur. Do not take more onions than the proportion mentioned above as it gives a sweetish tinge to the final yesur.
2. Remove stems of the dry red chillies and sun-dry them.
3. Add oil to a pan and roast chillies lightly on low flame.
4. Fry every ingredient separately on low flame. Everything must be fried well but do not let anything blacken. This skill comes with practice and experience.
5. Pound everything well in an ukhal, add salt and mix.

This entire process would take almost half a day. This laborious and gruelling process would also burn the eyes and skin of the women.

7. **Fresh yesur**: It was made in emergency situations where meat was brought and the stored yesur had run out. While roasting bhakris, a couple of onions would be slid directly into the hot fire to be roasted. When the bhakris were done, the hot tava was used to fry fresh red chillies or fresh green chillies or dry red chillies over a low flame. Then other ingredients such as dry coconut, coriander seeds, other spices—whatever was available—were fried. Then the roasted onions and salt were added to all these fried things and a nice paste was made on a stone grinder. This fresh yesur has a distinctive taste.

Ingredients

1. 2 onions
2. Chillies (whole fresh green, fresh red or dry red), stems removed
3. Dry coconut pieces
4. Coriander seeds
5. Spices, any or all of these: black pepper, cloves, black cardamom, rock flower, star anise, nagkesar (rose chestnut), cinnamon, caraway seeds, bay leaf
6. Oil
7. Salt

Method

1. Roast the onions on a low flame while cooking bhakris. Peel and chop roughly.
2. On a hot tava, add a little oil and fry chillies on low flame. Remove from tava.
3. Now fry the coconut pieces and remove. Fry the spices and immediately remove from tava so they do not burn.
4. Put all the roasted ingredients and salt in the grinder and make a fine paste. Fresh yesur is ready.

8. **Onion chutney**: Grind red chili powder, chopped onion and a little salt together. One needs to be careful while pounding as it may go into one's eyes and cause trouble.
9. **Karalyachi (niger seeds) chutney**: Niger was grown during the kharif season. Lightly roast it, add red chilli powder, a pinch of salt and pound it. Chopped garlic can also be added.
10. **Javas (flaxseeds) chutney**: This was grown along with other crops during the rabi season. This chutney is made in the same way as karalyachi chutney.
11. **Javsachya bondanchi (flax fruits) chutney**: The fruits were picked before ripening. They were tossed in a hot tava along with yesur and salt in oil on low flame and then allowed to cook for two or three minutes. It is delicious as a side dish.
12. **Ambadichi (sorrel seeds) chutney**: The sorrel plant also bears fruits that have seeds. These seeds are also made in the same way as niger seeds chutney.
13. **Jhingyachi (shrimp) chutney**: After bringing dried shrimp from the weekly market, lightly fry them on a tava, add a little salt and grind this with red chilli powder.

14. **Bombil (Bombay duck) chutney**: Same as dry shrimp.

Khar (pickle)

Pickle is called lonche in Marathi but in this region, it is called khar. Khar was assumed to be only of mango. It was made only after the mangoes were plucked in summer. The mango tree first bears tiny mangoes. Such fresh, small ones were used for making chutneys or quick, fresh pickles by adding turmeric powder, red chilli powder and salt. But the real, storable, elaborate pickle was made only of the fully grown, yet unripe mangoes. Such mangoes were picked, kept in water and then allowed to dry. Then they were cut into pieces including the seeds.

Ingredients

1. 50 mangoes, cut as above
2. 500 g salt
3. 60 g coriander seeds
4. 1 tablespoon turmeric powder
5. 100 g mustard seeds
6. 250 grams niger seeds (or peanut crush if niger unavailable)
7. Garlic cloves, peeled
8. 1 large bowl groundnut oil
9. Handful of fenugreek seeds

Method

1. Take all the ingredients from salt to niger seeds and grind.
2. Take large clean dry vessel and thoroughly mix the mango pieces with this masala mixture.
3. Cut peeled garlic cloves into halves and add to this.
4. Fill in a big clean, dry jar. Cover the jar and keep for two to three days.
5. Boil a large bowl of oil and let it cool down.
6. Add this cooled oil to the jar, enough to cover the mango pieces, along with a handful of fenugreek seeds.
7. The khar is now ready to be eaten all year round.

Children loved to eat this well-soaked khar by spreading pieces of mango and the masala on a hot jowar bhakri and making it into a roll.

Hurda

Hurda—fresh, tender kernels of jowar—were harvested only during rabi season. Dew would fall on tiny jowar plants during winters. It would taste sweetish. Later, sweet granules would form. Children loved to eat these granules and also the liquid. Fresh, tender cobs of jowar were peeled and eaten just like one would eat sugarcane.

Tender kernels would be separated from their coverings. This was called ‘nisavane’. Then they would ripen. Tender and juicy kernels would be formed. Once they aged a bit, they were called hurda. This would mature and become bheda and the final ready-to-harvest jowar was called lunga.

Hurda was also eaten raw or after light roasting. It would be roasted using cow dung cakes as fuel. Hot cobs were rubbed in the palms, blown to remove ash particles and then eaten. The action of blowing these fresh, tender grains was called hurda funkane. This term is also used for useless men who just want to project that they have done a lot whereas they do only the last, visible and easiest task. Grains stuck to the cobs were beaten and separated. Some stubborn kernels would be allowed to dry and then they were taken home and separated.

Lombya

Wheat was sowed during the rabi season. When it came into bloom, the fresh ears of wheat were called lombya. After these ears developed and were filled with wheat grains, some wheat plants were uprooted and the ears were roasted. Roasted ears were rubbed and separated like hurda. The fresh green wheat in the remaining ears were also separated. Dried hurda and lombya were later used for making ghugarya and sanjura poli for the naming ceremonies of children. Lombya is called 'ombya' in academic or standard Marathi.

Fasting

In the Mang and Mahar castes, religious fasting was mainly done for their own gods and goddesses. Men and women who were assigned the responsibility for all the religious rituals of their family would observe fasts. They would eat once a day, usually dinner, which was called *upvas sodane* or breaking the fast.

The traditional fasts of Mangs and Mahars included skipping one meal or fasting the whole day. Due to the influence of the Vaishnav community, some of them started eating kashiphal bopala, devdanagar, ratali and bhagar (various pumpkins, sweet potatoes and barnyard millet) as a fasting snack or meal. Some of these people, especially the Potaraj, would stop eating if a lamp extinguished while they were breaking their fast or even during their regular meals. They would not resume eating even after lighting the lamp again. Faral (light food) and fruits were supposed to be eaten during fasts. But these castes were so poor that they could afford neither. Some people would not speak a word while breaking the fast. Some would also try to avoid hearing anything spoken by Dalit people while having meals. (It was surprising how they could avoid hearing anything spoken by their own kin!)

Fruits

Seasonal fruits were part of the Mang and Mahar diet in an organic and easy manner. It mainly consisted of mangoes, custard apples, ramphal (a variant of custard apple), local berries, guava, papaya, banana and carrots.

Also, other fruits and fruity vegetables such as amla, karvanda (carandas plums), umbara (cluster figs), tondli (ivy gourd), kakadya (cucumber) and many more were eaten. In the rabi season, shendada (musk melon) was also sown along with jowar as a mixed crop. When the fruits on the vines were left covered in the same soil, they would automatically ripen. Their fragrance was similar to apples. These fruits were also eaten. Moreover, chinch (tamarind) and limbu (lemons) were eaten.

The Mangs' and Mahars' sweet consumption was restricted to sugarcane, honey (if someone broke open a honeycomb) and jowar's sweet juice and granules. Sometimes they would also nibble on shelvat (glue berries) and gonna (smaller and sweeter berries).

Forest tubers

It is said that sages, saints, monks and people living in exile would survive only by eating roots and tubers. But the main credit of discovering 'the real tubers' should be given to Mangs.

Making ropes out of various parts of plants was one of the many traditional tasks that Mangs did. They would cut the leaves of kektad (*Agave americana*), trim its thorns and make ropes from its fibres by putting it through a series of processes.

They had the innate knowledge of eating the sweetish pulp that was found in this plant. Some people were allergic to this pulp and their skin would itch after consuming it. But most people didn't suffer from any such side effects.

Some of these plants grow tall and develop straight stems. They blossom and bear fruits. These stems, with a girth of about a foot, have a delicate, moist and massive pulp. Mang people cut these stems into three- to

four-foot-long logs, peel them carefully, colour them with kaav (a natural beige pigment stone) and make them look like edible tubers. People buy them happily, believing them to be medicinal forest tubers.

Maize

A small amount of maize was harvested during the kharif season. Corn bhakris were made only if nothing else was available. But corn cobs were roasted or boiled and eaten with gusto. The cobs would be peeled, cleaned, chopped and boiled in salt water. Some people would also cook these cobs in the extra gravy of meat.

Walvana (dried and fried items)

Sometimes women from the Mang and Mahar castes too would make dried storable items such as kuravadya, papadya, kondyachya papadya and bhushari sandage.

Kuravadya

Whole wheat grains are soaked and pounded. After removing the bhusa (dust or bran) the thick milky white paste is compressed with the shevga machine and kuravadya are made. These are dried and stored. These can be fried whenever needed. Usually these are fried on festivals.

Bhushari sandge

The leftover bhusa—the sticky bran from the above recipe—is used for making bhushari sandga. It is formed into small balls or chunks that are dried and stored. These are used in the following way:

Ingredients

1. Oil
2. Onions, chopped
3. Red chilli powder
4. Salt
5. Peanut crush
6. Bhushari sandge

If available

1. Turmeric powder
2. Coriander powder

Method

1. Heat a little oil in a pan and add the chopped onion.
2. Add some water once the onion merges with the oil.
3. When the water boils, add red chilli powder, salt and peanut crush.
4. Add turmeric powder and coriander if available.
5. When the mixture boils, add the dried and stored bhushari sandge. The curry is ready when the sandge are cooked and become soft.

It tastes fine. However, sandge made from whole wheat would stink. That’s probably why pretentious people are called ‘bhushari sandga’—they do not stink but lack real substance.

Jwarichya papadya

Jowar is pounded and then soaked. Once it is well soaked, the mixture is sieved, the bran is removed and the remaining milky white juice is boiled, adding salt. Small papads are patted out, dried and stored. Some people may add cumin seeds. These papadya can be roasted and are used throughout the year. Some eat these with peanuts too.

Kondyachya papadya

Pounded and soaked jowar is taken out of the water, dried and pounded again. It is sieved and the bran is removed. Then it is ground to form kanya—small granules. Red chilli powder, salt and crushed garlic are mixed in these kanya. Bran is added to this and the mixture is kept overnight. Papadya are made in the morning. Some women make sandge (small chunks) from the same mixture. These dried papadya are roasted and eaten. Some people eat these papadya without roasting.

Maapa (measures)

Each era and region has its own units of measurement and systems to measure quantities of various things that are commonly used. Although the decimal system was adopted in India after Independence, some of the older measures were in use until much later. Some are in use even today. For example, even today the common people will use those references for grain, milk, spices, wood, bundles of harvested crops and so on.

These were some units of measurements (the approximate metric equivalents are given after each):

Chiwala (50 ml), niwala (75–100 ml), mapat (150–200 gm), chipat (250 gm), atawa (1 kg), sher (2 kg), adali (approx. 2.5–3 kg), paayali (7 kg) and so on were used to measure grains. The unit munn (40 kg) was for wood and larger amounts of grain. For jowar, however, one munn is about 100 kilos.

Before the metric system, the unit of measurement for smaller quantities (such as spices) was gunj (gunj is a vine with sweet leaves—a leaf weighed approximately a tenth of 1 gm), and weights based on it were masa (1 gm), tola (10 gm), chhataak (20 gm), aadpav (70 gm), ardhapav (125 gm), pav (250 gm), sher (approx. 2 kg), rattal (approx. 1.25 kg).

Milk was measured out in chivala, nivala, tambya, charvi and so on.

Mangoes were sold on the basis of fadi, which equals six mangoes. Later, the system of measuring in hundreds started.

Kadaba (hay) and bundles of harvested crop plants were measured in pachundya, meaning ‘five heaps’.

Men and women of the Mahar and Mang castes used to calculate money in multiple, of twenties like *ek visa*, *don visa* (one twenty, two twenties), etc. The unit ‘khandi’ (1 khandi = 20) was used to count animals and sacks of grain.

Land was measured in acres. ‘One number’ land was the term for land measuring 40 acres. If someone owned land measuring 110 acres, he would say, ‘I have land just short of number three.’

Postnatal diet

Most Mang and Mahar women used to work until their day of delivery. They would also have complaints during pregnancy such as nausea but no one paid any heed or gave them any special attention. Marriage, pregnancy and delivery were treated as a part of life. Women with no children were considered an aberration from this natural cycle.

For the first three days after childbirth, the woman was given a small bowl of ‘limkadya’ juice (juice of neem twigs, not leaves) every morning. Then ‘Teltikundi’ was given—a fistful of dry coconut, peppercorns, garlic cloves and oil. It was supposed to be chewed and eaten. After her bath, she was given cooked rice with oil and jaggery.

After the fifth day ritual, aleev (halim seeds or garden cress seeds) was also given along with rice, either as a porridge or as kheer by adding jaggery and milk. Aleev seeds, which are similar to tulsi or sabja seeds (basil seeds), are sold by herb vendors. Sukvada-dukvada was prepared on the same day and offered to the woman for the next few days. It would consist of dried dates, dry coconut, sugar, cardamom, fennel seeds and fried

dinka (edible gum). All these were pounded together and a small bowlful of this was given to her every morning.

In order to prevent stomach ailments in the child, the mother was given paan (betel leaf) with kaatbol (red paste made from the khair tree, also available with herb vendors), ova (carom seeds), vekhand (*Acorus calamus*), badishep (fennel seeds) and jayfal (nutmeg). The mother would eat all this and then blow into the baby's mouth.

Fashi for the mother, more milk for the baby

After the fifth-day puja, the mother was given fashi (epiglottis), which was believed to facilitate more milk secretion. After the twelfth day, the mother's diet would consist of alani mutton (meat curry made with basic condiments without masalas) besides other light meals.

Funeral rites and food

The custom of burial was prevalent in the Mang and Mahar castes. This was the norm in all non-Vedic and non-Aryan communities, unlike other Hindu castes that practised cremation. Also, the practical difficulty in procuring wood may have been a major hindrance for such poor and downtrodden communities in cremating their dead.

After a death in the household, no food was cooked in the house for the first three days. Relatives and people from the community would bring cooked food to the mourning family. They had a tradition of '*mati savadane*' (to set the soil properly) on the third day. Some other rituals such as removing the vakta (cloth kept on the head of the person performing the last rites, usually the son) and *khande utaravane* (circling of neem leaves dipped in cow urine around the shoulders of the pallbearers) were also performed. The deceased soul was offered naivedya (holy food offering) after three days and the official mourning would end. They never had traditions such as rites for the tenth day or twelfth day, monthly rites and so on, common in other Hindu castes. It was also common for women from these castes to visit cemeteries, which was not the case with upper castes. Since the dead bodies were buried, there was no concept of immersing ashes in the holy Ganges. They would resume their normal life, setting out for work and doing their chores from the fourth day onwards. Annual death anniversaries, however, were performed.

The custom of feeding the ancestors is followed, just like with other Hindu castes. In the mhaal or shradh (the fortnight observed every year for performing the holy rites of all ancestors), dead souls are offered meals. Cemetery is called smashan or masanvat in Marathi and dhayara in the Mangs' dialect. The phrase soyare-dhayare has been derived from this word. It indicates all relatives who participate in all the critical occasions such as childbirth (soyare), weddings and funerals (dhayare).

Food and a way of life

In rural areas, it took time to clean and segregate vegetables for making a dry curry. Besides, there was no guarantee that such dry preparations would be sufficient for everyone. There was more emphasis on thin, watery curries. Even if a person or two suddenly arrived for meals, there was no stress. The system of '*ghal pani aan kar kalchyavani*' ('add water and let them stay, that's how you made it yesterday') was followed. Peanut crush or jowar or bajra flour was added to make the curries thicker to avoid the risk of them seeming skimpy or insipid. Jowar and bajra bhakris were dry and they absorbed water. So, the practice of mashing them into watery gravies and eating these puffed-up bhakri pieces came into being. Without this, people would not feel that they had eaten enough. Having a dry curry as an accompaniment to bhakri would compel the eaters to sip water from time to time to swallow the doubly dry mixture.

While instructing how much to add in any preparations, the women would say: nakbhar (as much as would sit on the extended nail), chimtibhar (a pinch), *pach botaat maavel ewdha* (that would fit into five fingers), muthbhar (fistful), pasabhar (handful—in a cupped palm), wanjalbhar (two handfuls—cupped and joined

palms), kudtabhar (a little more, which fits into the fold of shirt), dhadutabhar (more than kudtabhar, which fits a larger piece of cloth).

The portions of a bhakri broken into pieces were referred to as: tukda (a piece), ghasbhar (like a morsel), nitkor (one-eighth), chatkor (one-fourth), ardhi (half) and tinkora (three-fourth). They would never make just one or three bhakris. Odd numbers were considered inauspicious. They would always make a tiny bhakri to be counted as second or fourth. Even while giving a parcel of bhakris, they would break one bhakri into two to make them an even number.

Since all these equations and associations of cooking, eating and people were closely intertwined, cooking didn't stay at a mere level of a daily task alone but became a sustainable formula of food culture and a blueprint of dietary practices for the benefit of future generations.

11

Our culinary tradition within the literature of our saints

People have been living in Maharashtra for centuries. Many dynasties have ruled here and eventually been wiped out. History has records of such rulers and their empires and their power. Research has been and will continue to be conducted. Lifestyles of the then social systems can be gauged based on inscriptions, coins, scriptures, historical documents, caves, ancient temples and archaeological excavations. However, food culture is usually ignored from the scope of these studies.

The caste system, class system and the respective food traditions are intact even in today's society. Over time, the intensity, power and reach of the caste and class system may have taken different forms, but it very much exists! In the eleventh century, Mahatma Basaveshwar had tried to axe the caste system by bringing about a social change. Subsequently, Shri Chakradhar Swami too tried the same. The efforts of both these saints were admirable, but what followed is baldly evident for all to see. We must admit that 900 years later, the transformation and fight against the caste system could take place only due to the arrival of the British Raj. Social justice and equality were brought into law, but they are yet to seep into the minds of people.

Historical documents are insufficient for understanding the life of the common people in the last 1,000 years until the time the British came to power. But the religious scriptures help us understand the food culture and caste system of those times. One can review the caste system and the caste hierarchy in the social structure through contemporary literature and religious scriptures. One can see how and at which level the class, caste and their food culture are mentioned.

To understand this, along with the most primal and profound books, namely *Leelacharitra* and *Dnyaneshwari*, the scriptures of fifty-three chief Marathi saints were studied. The list includes the saints Nivruttinath, Sopandeo, Muktabai, Namdev, Janabai, Chokhamela, Eknath, Tukaram and Ramdas. These saints are widely read and respected by Marathi people at large and are not confined to their own respective sects and followers. Although Shri Chakradhar and Ramdas are considered to be of different ideologies, one can feel the effect of Bhagawat dharma on Sant Ramdas also to some extent. Among these saints, Shri Chakradhar is the only one who put forth the concept differently. This needs to be mentioned specially. Among the Bhagavat or Warkari sects, from Sant Namdev to Santaji Teli Jagnade (Chakankar), the perspective and traditions are not contradictory to each other but are complementary to the sect. Their foundation is the same and that is Shrimad Bhagavat. Sant Eknath's critical writings, *Bhavarth Eknathi Bhagavat*, on the 'Ekadasha Skandha' of Shrimad Bhagavat is very useful for understanding the Bhagavat sect. Eknath's writing has made a great contribution in the world of Marathi-speaking people.

Well, whatever existed in those times was according to the then contemporary framework of the social system. All the saints made concrete efforts to inculcate novel thought into those systems. Therefore, they are considered venerable even today. It would be unfair to express a different perspective on their literature, disregarding the social framework of those times. Most of these saints were ahead of their times. This book is not an effort to undermine their thoughts, but it is a sincere and curious effort to understand how much they have thought of 'our existence and social position', how much they have included 'us' in their literature. After reading this book, if anyone publishes a booklet using this writing in isolation with the intention of spreading social unrest, this writer will be the first person to protest against it.

There are many religious texts in Marathi, but they are confined to their respective groups. The Mahanubhav and Warkari sects are said to be all-inclusive. Therefore, it is necessary to mention that the

religious texts known and generally acceptable to Marathi-speaking people have been reviewed and analysed here.

Leelacharitra

Leelaacharitra is considered to be the first prominent book in Marathi. Along with the biography of Shri Chakradhar, descriptions of the social life of that time have been chronicled in this book. After *Gaathasaptshati* this is the key book that details and reveals the then social life culture. Chakradhar's active efforts were to keep the common men and followers of 'yajna' culture away from the religious violence and rituals related to it.

There are mentions in *Leelacharitra*, *Dnyaneshwari*, etc., that in the eleventh and twelfth century, proponents of sacrifice systems like 'Shaakta panth', 'Shaktipitha', etc., did exist. The violence generated from yajna is also mentioned. Such violence-based holy rituals were only for Brahmins and Kshatriyas. The Vaishyas and Shudras were not considered eligible for such rituals. Animals were sacrificed in holy rituals at Mahur and other Shakti pithas.

Leelacharitra contains ample mentions of eatables, utensils and things related to culinary activities of those times. A few of these names exist even today. A few names which we do not understand today, probably changed over time. Words related to non-vegetarian food like saguti and yesur were used even in those times.

There are scores of words, too many to list here, that are still used unchanged today; others ring with meanings that can be discerned; still others are like mysterious echoes, lost in the mists of time, where we grope for their meaning.

Dnyaneshwari

Dnyaneshwari is a text very dear to the common Hindu people of Maharashtra, including the Warkari sect. Many scholars have critiqued *Dnyaneshwari* many times (not in the sense of 'criticizing'). Many erudite women have reviewed the author Sant Dnyaneshwar's deliberations on the Bhagavad Gita. They will keep on writing their own interpretations. In the same way, this is a sort of a review of what this writer has comprehended about food references found in *Dnyaneshwari*.

There is a clear mention of four classes (chaturvarna) in *Dnyaneshwari*. Different castes and communities such as Bhil, Pardhi, Vanavasi, Matang, Mang, Chandal, Dhivar, Antyaju, Musalman, Kolhati, Maduri, Shudra, etc., are also mentioned. However, these castes are mentioned as metaphors of something bad, evil or sinful. The author has deliberated on which class was consuming which food and how this diet might impact their behaviour. The abominable representation of these classes and castes was in accordance with the social norms of those times. It is disheartening that he did not attempt to negate this social image or belief. Nevertheless, if Dnyaneshwar were alive today, his deliberations would have been different.

While reviewing food culture, one realizes that Dnyaneshwar's stance towards food culture is the same as that towards castes. While describing the hierarchy of castes, his stance seems to be very clear. (Or is it the stance originally stated in the Bhagavad Gita? After all, *Dnyaneshwari* is merely its interpretation!)

In *Dnyaneshwari* (9:33) the shlokas state that Brahmins are like gods on earth. They are bodily incarnations of penance. They are strong, skilled, aware, pious and gay. They lead the way.

People who follow and believe in Dnyaneshwar's perception of social classes exist in some form or the other even today. People with a very firm belief in the concept of diet as told by Dnyaneshwar are still religiously following it. History states that in Dnyaneshwar's era, the old yajna (animal sacrifice) culture was almost over, so the yajnas Dnyaneshwar refers to are sattvic and non-violent.

Dnyaneshvari (3:13, 3:31–33) says: Food is not something just to be merely eaten. It is a form of Brahma —the god who represents the universe. Food is an essential instrument to live life and to enrich and augment it.

While correlating faith and food, Dnyaneshwar has divided people among three classes (varnas). Actually, five varnas were well known: Brahmin (priests and scholars), Kshatriya (warriors), Vaishya (traders), Shudra (artisans) and Ati Shudra (others, untouchables). He must have clubbed the last three classes into one and

tagged them all as Shudras. Perhaps this is done in order to attribute the three types of diet to each varna. Sattvic to the Brahmins, rajasic to the Kshatriyas and tamasic to the third varna.

His accounts and concepts of tamasic food are not very clear. He doesn't even specify the attributes of each type in any great detail. He only explains tastes of particular foods and the desirable or undesirable effects of their consumption on health, psychology and behaviour. After understanding the food contents of rajasic and tamasic diet, one can infer which tastes should be or should not be included in the 'sattvic' diet. He mentions non-vegetarian food as part of the tamasic diet only indirectly by way of mentioning animal sacrifice. He may have done this as it was probably forbidden for Brahmins in those times to directly talk about non-vegetarian food. Whatever be the reason, it is true that Dnyaneshwar, who did not shy away from mentioning forbidden drinks, avoided mentioning forbidden food.

The seventeenth chapter of *Dnyaneshwari* deals with penance, worship, yajna (triprakaaru, of three types), faith, diet, good or bad effects of diet on health, psychology, human behaviour, philosophy, positive thoughts and negative thoughts in depth. He has explained the differences between yajna, penance, bestowal and diet.

In this chapter the ways of worshipping, faith and diets are divided into three main types. In the classification of diets as sattvic, rajasic and tamasic, there is no direct mention of any castes but their association with varnas is prominent. One can't speculate as to which varna he perceived for Vaishyas (traders). Why did he define only three classes? His three-way classification explains the social life, different ways of worshipping, deities, rituals and food culture according to different classes very clearly. The following is a short review of the diet composition Dnyaneshwar has mentioned.

Sattvic ahar

According to the principle of 'diet determines faith', people who eat sattvic ahar (diet that enhances sattva—happiness, harmony and health) will have a simple and stress-free life. In chapter X, Dnyaneshwar writes in verses 76, 77, 83, 85 and 86 about those following the sattvic faith. He deliberates on the advantages of eating sattvic food in verses 25–38.

Summary: Those who have understood the essence of life are sattvic. Those who eat sattvic food worship God. Sattvic men hold high regard for sattvic food. The sattvic diet increases longevity. Intelligence, strength, pleasure, health and love are augmented. Such food increases the power of the mind and body. This food establishes a relation with truth, knowledge and happiness. And man is completely contented from within.

Rajasic ahar

Rajasic ahar (royal diet that enhances activity, anger and aggression) is also is called 'rajoguni aahar'. *Dnyaneshwari* in its fourth verse talks about rajasic diet and the deities and the faiths of those who consume such food.

Summary: Does rajasic mean those who administer kingdoms? Rajasic diet eaters always worship or pray with the expectation of some gains. Their food usually has a lot of bitter, sour, salty, spicy and pungent elements in it. They like dry, hot and acrid food. They develop feelings of sadness, stress and often become sick because they eat such food, though they are not worried about these consequences. The use of clove and dry ginger in the food does affect their health adversely.

Tamasic ahar

Dnyaneshwar speaks about people eating tamasic ahar (diet that induces lust, lethargy and lividity) and their ways of prayers.

Summary: Dnyaneshwar has elaborated on the tamasic diet more than on the sattvic and rajasic diets. He says people eating a tamasic diet will eventually be born into the same form, because filling a pot of liquor with Ganga water does not make it sacred.

He says that people following tamasic ahar consume all kinds of food—stale, partially eaten by someone else, half-baked, overcooked, scorched, unholy (is he referring to non-vegetarian food here?). He also says

that it is disgusting to even talk about their repulsive diet. Food cooked in the morning is consumed in the afternoon by them or sometimes even on the next day. They always wish and pray for the suffering of others. Their worship rituals are without any sacred feelings and lack donations, food offerings, holy rituals, mantras and faith.

There are some extremist groups in society even today, that strongly believe in what Dnyaneshwar has described. They even try and implement his words. If diet is linked to behaviour and character, then why has the class system and caste system survived to this day? Why the fight against untouchability? Who compelled Dalits to eat inferior food? When they are told about its ill effects, they should also be given a choice of eating a sattvic diet.

Those who support or consume a sattvic diet play no role in in the (physical) process of growing crops.

The idea 'As you eat, so you think' does not stand the test of science. If that were the case, would the rajasic-food-eating countries have revolutionized the scientific field so much? During the time of Dnyaneshwar, there were no fridges, freezers or cold storage facilities. Today food can be preserved for days together using these facilities. If leftover, stale, partially eaten and discarded, half-cooked, scorched, overcooked, inferior, rotten food is tamasic, why would anyone eat it? The fact that someone eats it suggest that they don't have any other option. The assumption that a majority section of the society eats this food of their own volition is baseless. That a section of society is suffering because of their sins in their last birth is a ludicrous mentality. Unfortunately, there are people who believe in it even today. Why is the theorem 'As you eat, so you think' not presented after providing all options first and then experimenting on 'food consumption' patterns? How can the food that has nourished so many generations be unholy?

From the above discussion it is clear that gods and faiths depend on the food we eat. The gods of people eating sattvic food are sattvic, and the same is the case with rajasic and tamasic food. Today's godmen who talk about sattvic vegetarian diet should understand that it is not their own finding but has come down several centuries.

Dnyaneshwar's *Abhanga-gatha*

Apart from writing *Bhavarthdipika* (commonly known as *Dnyaneshwari*), Sant Shri Dnyaneshwar has also written *Abhanga-gatha*, *Amritanubhav*, *Changdevpasashti* and so on. This is an attempt to find some examples of food habits and food culture from his book *Abhanga-gatha*.

In one of the abhangas (a poetry form), while describing the flirting, fun and frolic of Lord Krishna, he talks about gorasu, meaning milk, butter and other milk products.

A woman pining for her lover asks a crow when the Lord Pandhari Raya will come. She offers curd-rice to the crow in exchange for this information.

Dnyaneshwar talks about those displaying faith in God but who secretly cheat and are fraudsters, and says that although they are saints by caste, their devotion is tainted. They can't think beyond themselves; they also eat non-vegetarian food.

Shri Changdev's abhanga

Changdev, a contemporary of Dnyaneshwar and a disciple of Sant Muktabai, is found to have written extraordinary and wondrous abhangas full of riddles. One of his abhangas has a metaphor based on food.

> A poor woman sells firewood by travelling to twelve villages. She makes delicious naivedya for God but herself survives on thorns. Such is the life of rituals. Despite working so arduously, one may not even have their basic needs fulfilled—so says Changa.

Sri Namdev Gatha

Namdev is one of the oldest saints of the Warkari sect. Namdev journeyed as far as Punjab outside of Maharashtra. In northern India, he raised the flag of Vaishnavism (the sect worshipping Lord Vishnu). It stands tall even today. Namdev had a long life. During his lifetime, he had close associations with saints like

Dnyaneshwar and his siblings (Muktabai, Nivrutti and Sopan), and Chokhamela, Goroba, Changdev, Savtamali, and others.

There is no other saint who travelled such a vast distance, enlightened people and returned. Naturally his work has references to the life, lifestyles, food, clothing, social structure and caste system of the society of that time. Such references are sometimes used as metaphors and sometimes as parables. Although the mentions of food by Namdev in some of the abhangas are symbolic, it is clear that these were a part of the diet of the common people at that time.

Curd, milk, buttermilk, ghee and butter are frequently mentioned. In one abhanga he has described various edible items and delicacies that are consumed even today.

In another abhanga some things like ginger, bel, elephant yam and pepper can be easily identified, but some other things, like meke, pai, etc., are unknown. It is not clear if these are known by some other names today or are simply not made any more.

Namdev delivers a parable in an abhanga. Using various examples such as milk, ghee, grapes, bananas, sugar, jaggery and so on, he says that God also has such unparalleled, pure sweetness.

This also shows that grapes were available in India during that time and they were sweet. Did grapes come to India from abroad? When? Or are the vines originally from here?

In the literature of saints, 'kanya' (porridge made of pounded grains) is a very frequently cited dish, because it was cooked in poor households. It did not taste great, but the gods would relish it when served by their poor devotees with love, he says. In an abhanga, Namdev says:

> In a Vaishnav household, one constantly hears the sound of taal [a pair of hand cymbals]. Their humble food consists of kanya and bhakri. The only wealth they have is in the form of Ram. They only have an old rug to sit on and a simple tulsi plant adorns their door. As they frequently bow to the Almighty, the only fasting snack they have is puffed jowar.

Food is characterized by six rasas (tastes) such as sweet, sour, salty, pungent, bitter and astringent. He describes these in one abhanga. In another, he talks about mouth fresheners, including camphor. Did they add camphor to edible betel leaf along with other things?

In the next one, he is perhaps describing a feast served in an elite household:

> Rukmini has served a feast. Come, see what it offers. There are decorated plates, a variety of dishes: fragrant rice, lentils, fritters, ghee, payasam and curd. Everything is so well arranged.

In an abhanga, he employs the word 'barvant', meaning a meal containing all six tastes. The word 'barbat' is still used in rural areas for some meat curries. Is this a corruption of the word barvant?

In another abhanga, Namdev mentions lemon, coconut, betel nut and banana. In the abhanga on Sant Muktabai, he mentions the flourishing bank of River Tapi. This abhanga is a parable about how one who is accustomed to eating plain kanji (rice porridge) would understand the importance of nectar. Later in this abhanga, Namdev says: 'The fruit "indravan" is much more beautiful than a pomegranate. But it tastes very bitter.' This fruit is unheard of today. Was it available in north India?

He also says: 'Castor is planted next to the sugarcane fields, but where will the sweetness come from?'

Another abhanga refers to foods such as pakwanna, bhet, lyalshi kadhi, vada, kshir meaning kheer, puran poli and ghee. All these are used to express devotion and prayers.

In another abhanga he observes how, no matter how much one disguises oneself, one's original nature does not change: Whether the sugarcane is chopped or juiced, it does not stop being sweet. But bitter fruits remain bitter despite adding sugar and milk.

In one abhanga, Namdev refers to the poisonous substance called bachnag. There are references of ridge gourds, gram dal, mande (a sweet flat bread), etc., in various abhangas. In another abhanga, he mentions raale, kanya, mande, butter and wheat flour.

Another verse says that when God comes to dine at a Mahar's house, the Mahar is taken aback and wonders what can be served. Does Namdev want to suggest that it was unholy to eat at a Mahar's house?

When someone acquired wealth, they would serve a feast to the Brahmins. Namdev describes that feast and mentions a list of recipes that include rice, ghee, mung dal nicely tempered with asafoetida and cumin seeds, curd-rice, wheat and jaggery kheer, sugar, fried items and so on.

Symbolic references to kasabs and khatiks are also found in Namdev's abhanga. While he doesn't talk directly about the classification of food, it is evident that his focus and presentation is meant for the Vaishnav people.

Sant Janabai's abhang

Sant Janabai from Gangakhed in Marathwada was a maid in the house of Sant Namdev. According to legend, Lord Vitthal himself used to help her in her laborious chores of grinding and sweeping. Her abhangas contain many references related to daily life.

In an abhanga, Janabai describes several daily chores, including various cooking processes and recipes. She uses various culinary metaphors; for example, she says how sattva should be kept boiling, and when virtue and good deeds are added to it, sin will spill over.

Sant Parisa Bhagavat

Sant Parisa was a contemporary of Sant Namdev. He was a Brahmin from Pandharpur. In one of his abhangas, he speaks of the importance of praying with devotion. He elaborates that just as it is pointless to add a seasoning of asafoetida to a sweet porridge, similarly a prayer without devotion is futile.

Sant Bhanudas Maharaj

Sribhanudas Maharaj was the great grandfather of Sant Eknath. He lived from 1445 to 1513. Some references about the then prevailing diet can be found in his abhangas. In one abhanga he talks about Lord Vitthal. He says God is equally happy eating rich, expensive things like butter and rice at a rich devotee's household and common, poor foods such as kanya and leftover rice at a poor devotee's humble home. Some of his other works also mention curd-rice, ghee, vermicelli and so on.

Sant Janardanaswamy

Saint Janardanaswamy was the guru of Sant Eknath who lived from 1504 to 1575. He has mentioned the importance of food donation in one of his abhangas. He says: 'Every guest should be offered food. This is the noblest and greatest donation of all.'

Sant Niloba

Sant Niloba was a disciple of Tukaram. Abhangas mentioning kaala (a special dish made during the festival of Krishna's birth anniversary) also appear in his compositions. The dish is a mixture of popped grains, milk, ghee, butter, sweet flatbreads, jaggery, ghugarya and so on. In another abhanga he compares rich foods with cheaper options. He also compares vegetarian and non-vegetarian foods.

Savta Mali

Being a farmer or gardener by caste and occupation, his compositions include common people's vegetables as metaphors for devotion.

He says that onions, radish and other vegetables are like Lord Vitthal to him. Garlic, chillies and coriander are like Lord Vishnu to him. Moat, ropes, wells are like the entirety of Pandharpur (holy town where Lord Vitthal resides). His orchard is like his devotion to the ultimate lord.

Sant Chokhamela

He is the most famous and first ever saint from the Dalit untouchable communitya Mahar. Curd-rice, the traditional favourite food of Vitthal, is mentioned in his abhangas. In one abhanga he talks about the system that obliges Dalits to eat leftovers: 'We live on food that others have tasted and wasted. Yet we are allowed to worship Lord Vitthal.'

His most famous abhanga talks about external appearance and internal characteristics. He appeals to people not to get lured by appearances, which may be misleading. Sugarcane looks rough but produces sweet juice.

He also describes the food habits of people who eat non-vegetarian food and consume alcohol, terming it as '*amangal*', meaning unholy.

Sant Soyrabai

Soyrabai was the wife of Sant Chokhoba (Chokhamela). The distinction of being the first Dalit woman saint belongs to her. In one of her sixty-two compositions, she appeals to her Lord to consider her humble offering of kanya as a special treat. She knows that it is not an appropriate meal for him hence the request.

Another abhanga mentions a circumstance that was socially impossible until a few years back: Brahmins eating at a Dalit house. She says that although the Brahmins of Pandharpur have tortured Chokhoba, now he has invited everyone to his home. There are so many people at his house that even goddesses have to wait for their turn. Many Brahmins are now enjoying the feast at his place.

Sant Banka

Sant Banka was the husband of Sant Nirmala, Chokhamela's sister. References to food culture and the caste system come together in his abhangas.

In one, he mentions his low caste and says that feeding such lowly people is not considered socially acceptable. But when someone does (feed a Dalit), it is like God himself is eating in disguise and then all the wishes of the person offering food will come true.

In one abhanga, Banka says: 'Please don't offer us fresh food, we are used to eating leftovers and wasted food.'

Sant Karmamela

Sant Karmamela was the son of Chokhamela. His mother was Sant Soyrabai. He carries forward the legacy of his parents and brother-in-law through his abhangas. Some of his abhangas are very similar to what Chokhamela and Soyrabai say in theirs, indicating the Mahar people's humble status.

The saga of the abhanga of Shri Tukarambuwa

(The erstwhile Bombay government published a compilation of his work in 1950 to mark 300 years since his demise.)

Numerous references, images and parables about food habits are found in the works of Sant Tukaram Maharaj. His lineage of a staunch Vaishnava tradition is often felt. Therefore, he continues the tradition of Sant Dnyaneshwar through his conduct, thoughts, diet, and overall perspective about human life. His work, in fact, furthers the beliefs of the Vaishnava tradition. He comes across as rebellious in some abhangas; but never does he seem to be denouncing the overall structure of the Bhagavat Vaishnav tradition.

About 400 years passed from the period of Dnyaneshwar to Tukaram, but there is no significant difference in the ideological role of the two with regard to the Vaishnava tradition except that of linguistic differences. During these 400 years, political changes took place on a large scale, but social establishments remained frozen. It is sad to mention this, but barring a stray case of Sant Eknath holding a Mahar child, no other incident or act proves otherwise. On the contrary, Tukaram's views on caste and food culture seem to be sharper, clearer and more direct. Just like Dnyaneshwar, Tukaram also follows suit by not rejecting the orthodox tradition.

Tukaram criticizes and attacks hypocrisy in society. But he doesn't seem to break down or challenge the

unjust norms or traditions of those times. He criticizes the Shakta sect, the worshippers of non-vegetarian goddesses in harsh words. It is natural that he has the same stand as Dnyaneshwar about food culture. He says:

> A female donkey may give milk but that doesn't equate her with a holy cow. A crow may wear a flower garland, but that doesn't make him a swan. A monkey may bathe and wear a tilak on his forehead, but that doesn't make him Brahmin. A Brahmin, however, may deviate from his path, but he is still the greatest in the entire universe.

This abhanga makes the caste supremacy so clear that it doesn't need any further explanation. The purpose of this writing is not to challenge the saint's literature, but to review the food culture of the time. What Tukaram wrote was appropriate for his time.

His book *Abhanga-gatha* has many references to contemporary food, utensils, grains, cooking methods and perceptions about food. For example, he talks about a stomach disorder and how milk-rice and ghee is the remedy for it (abhanga 36). He warns people not to touch the bowl which is full of poison (abhanga 41).

He also gives the metaphor of the fisherman and the butcher:

> The fisherman offers food to the fishes, the butcher feeds the animals, but these acts don't show their love and care.

There are abhangas talking about 'kaala', a preparation that mixes various ingredients together, and becomes delicious and nutritious. This process is used as a metaphor.

In some abhangas, the arduous tasks of grinding, winnowing, sieving and so on are used as metaphors for the toil in the path of devotion. They have nothing to do with the actual cooking and allied processes.

In the 'daka' abhangas (413–420), Tukaram uses sheep sacrifice rituals to describe his complete surrender to Lord Vitthal. The daka is a percussion instrument still in use. It is used in the ritual of Satvai puja that's performed on the sixth day after childbirth. Gondhal, Hakare and Ekvira Devi are mentioned in this abhanga. (Gondhal or Jagran Gondhal is a religious song and dance ceremony performed in the night by traditional artists. This is commissioned by families before any wedding in the house with the hope that everything will go well. Prayers or appeal by the Potaraj to Mari-aai, Mhasoba and Laxmi-aai are known as Hakare. Ekvira Devi is a goddess sitting in the mountains who is worshipped as a family goddess by many Hindu communities.)

In the abhanga of Pandharpur (24), although Tukaram used food references metaphorically, it is clear that they existed then. Moreover, he also describes the differences in butchers—khatiks who slaughter goats and sheep, and kasabs who slaughter large animals such as cows, bulls and buffaloes.

Addictive substances mentioned include various types of alcohol, hash, marijuana, chillum, tobacco, betel nut and betel leaves. A vast number of preparations and edible things such as curds, milk, buttermilk, ghee, butter, asafoetida, bhokar, sesame seeds, rice, wheat, kheer, sugarcane, sweets, sugar, ghee mixed with sugar, banana, kanya, mustard and many more are mentioned, as well as poisonous substances.

Many terms used by Tukaram are still extant. Bonay means offering, and also sacrifice. This word is still used in villages as 'nivad bonay', meaning naivedya. Basar means stale food and bakhar means stuffing. Liquor extracted from jowar is referred to as pendha. The pots and pans of that time are still called by the same names.

A section on Tukaram must end with his own thoughts—that arguments should not be made just for the sake of argument. Arguments should be made for facilitating change, creating something new and seeding fruitful thoughts.

Tukaram says: I earnestly urge you to end all toxic arguments.

Ramdas Swami

Although Ramdas Swami does not belong to the traditional Warkari sect, his writings must be considered in this review. Not only because he is a contemporary of Sant Tukaram, but also because his writings talk about the political and social situation of that time. He is not as bitter as other saints from the Warkari and Bhagavat sects are about the Shakta and Shaivite sects. Ramdas's writings also mention diet and its types, namely sattvic, rajasic and tamasic.

In his collection *Dasbodh* he has dealt with various types of writing. This is a brief review of his food-related writing.

In one verse, Ramdas says:

> Anyone who talks to a person belonging to a lower caste, has an affair with someone else's wife or eats while walking down the street should be considered a fool.

In the next verse, he says:

> Anyone who treats lower castes as equals, argues with them, or drinks water using the left hand, is a fool.

Ramdas says about diet and addiction:

> Don't eat too much, don't sleep too much, don't stay too long at a fool's house. Don't smoke. Don't accept immoral wealth. Don't make friends with intrusive people. Ramdas advises you to fulfil the vows made to God, but not to kill animals.

Distinguishing between the three leanings of sattva, rajas and tamas, Ramdas talks about tamas first. The shloka says:

> Tamasic diet and nature leads to re-birth in a lower form. The appetite of such people is large and they cannot differentiate between bitter and sweet because of this heightened hunger. They are also stupid. They love to kill insects, ants and animals. They like to kill women and children, and for money, they don't mind killing Brahmins and cows as well.

Another shloka says:

> The sattvic man donates money, clothes, food, water and feeds the Brahmins. He donates a thousand meals, lakhs of meals. He donates a variety of things. He prepares food for God. He offers a variety of fruits to God. He fasts for God, abstains from meals and betel leaf. He regularly chants and meditates.

Ramdas Swami describes various people and their diets:

> Those who live only on milk, those who do not eat anything, those who eat only fruits, those who live on grass and those who eat anything and everything.

He also speaks of things offered to the gods:

> All sorts of delicious foods are presented as holy offerings including various fruits and a variety of betel leaves.

A Shudra deity named Uchhishta Chandali is mentioned twice in Ramdas Swami's book, a deity whose name is not heard anywhere today. He says that those who observe a penance for her must keep a piece of bhakri in their mouth and repeatedly chant a mantra that is dedicated to her.

In another verse, he has used food as a metaphor for spiritual conduct:

> A man sits down to eat. He looks at the plate with wide, expectant eyes. He sprinkles some water around the plate and starts eating. He puts a morsel in his mouth with his hand and bites it neatly with his teeth.

> He tastes the food with his tongue. He also spits out when he gets a hair, stick or a stone in the bite. If the food is lacking salt, he asks for it. He yells at his wife. He rolls his eyes with anger. The good taste of the food makes him happy. If it is bland, he feels sad. He selects different flavours from different foods. If the food is spicy, he shakes his head and coughs. If there is a lot of pepper in the food, he yells saying that the dish tastes weird like a piece of mud. Today he has eaten to his heart's content. He picks up the cup and slowly drinks the water.

Ramdas has described the attributes of people detached from this world, with specific guidance on their food intake. A verse advises:

> A detached person should not go to married people's homes. He shouldn't eat unholy food. He shouldn't accept invitations for feasts, etc.

Another says:

> A detached person should not go for events like funeral rituals, sixth-day ceremony, naming ceremony, house-warmings, vows, thread ceremony and so on. He should not eat meals at such celebrations or rituals. Eating food there leads to obligations.

Fire is essential for cooking. Ramdas says about fire:

> Fire in a Shudra's house is also holy. Fire is sacred everywhere, in every home.

In another verse, Ramdas describes various naivedyas offered to different deities. For instance, at Venkatesh (perhaps Tirumala or Tirupati), devotees eat food standing unlike the usual norm of sitting and eating. The naivedya platter includes fried things such as vade, dhirdi (pancakes), khamang appe (small balls made of roasted grains) and so on.

Goddess Banashankari is offered plenty of vegetables. Baby Bhima is served a lot of dahiwade (curds and fried black gram dal dumplings). Lord Khandoba is offered kandebharit (an onion preparation) and rodge (thick flat breads).

Although Ramdas was a devotee of Lord Rama, his preaching was not confined to the Vaishnava sect alone. He had respect for other deities too. His contemporaries and even earlier saints were staunch supporters of the Vaishnava sect exclusively. Ramdas says that same soul resides in everyone including thirty-three crore gods, eighty-eight thousand rishis (monks), numerous ghosts, fifty-six crore avatars of the goddess Chamunda, nine crore avatars of the goddess Katyayani, the moon, the sun, stars, planets, the galaxy, the constellations, demons, humans, animals and all other living beings.

Bhavartha Eknathi Bhagavat, volumes 1 and 2

Shrimad Bhagavat Gita is one of the important holy books that describes religion and overall human behaviour. The same has been seen to have percolated down to the literature produced in India in the Vaishnav sect and in Maharashtra in the Bhagavat sect. Many poems are written based on the tenth volume of Shrimad Bhagavat. *Srikrishna Charitra*, amongst them, is the most popular among all sects. Karnataka saw the rise of Kannada saints inspired by Ramanujacharya, Madhvacharya Nimbark and Wallabhacharya before Sant Eknath. The Bhakti movement spread in the south due to Ramanujacharya's influence. The Alwar tradition of saints in the south and the Bhagavat tradition of saints in Maharashtra were inclusive and they had saints from all castes. Saint Eknath wrote a review of *Ekadashskandh* (eleventh volume) from Shrimad Bhagavat. Through this, he threw light on the Bhagavat sect, its concept and structure. This book is known as *Eknathi Bhagavat*.

Dnyaneshwar pioneered the Bhagavat sect. This tradition is still standing tall. There is a rich tradition of Marathi saints from Dnyaneshwar to Sant Pisa. Each one of them has contributed to this development to the best of their individual ability. The influence of the tenth and eleventh volumes of Shrimad Bhagavat is

clearly seen in the literature of Marathi saints. It is quite natural. Even Ramdas Swami, who didn't belong to the sect, is no exception.

While studying the food and food culture mentioned in this literature, the categories of sattvic, rajasic and tamasic, and the difference between them are clearly visible. These differences arise due to class, caste and roles assigned to each class and caste. The food culture also becomes clearer on the basis of class and caste. That's why it is important to study class and caste when one is looking at food culture.

Although there is hardly any direct mention of non-vegetarian food consumption, the fact that there were fishermen and hunters reveals that fish and meat were very likely a part of the diet.

Eknathi Bhagavat, volume 1

A verse from *Eknathi Bhagavat*, volume 1, talks about how one should welcome their guest Narad Muni (a god-sage, travelling singer and messenger) treating him as Narayan (God). His feet should be washed in a gold plate and he should be offered madhupark as a holy offering. The word madhupark is not explained. Madhu means honey so it's possible to confuse it with some dessert made with honey. But madhupark actually means a non-vegetarian meal.

Chapter 3 mentions an oil mill and the Teli community (oil- makers) metaphorically. This shows that Telis were in the oil business even then.

Chapter 3, verse 25 says that when begging, one should consume all of the alms received, without storing any. Amongst other things, it uses the metaphor of butter. Butter separates from buttermilk, and once it becomes butter, it never merges with the buttermilk again. One should be as pure and detached as butter.

Alcoholism is mentioned in Chapter 5, verse 6. B.P. Vai Shankarrao Maharaj Kandharkar has stated that the sautramani yajna mentioned in the shloka is performed to end alcohol addiction.

Chapter 5, verse 7 talks, through a parable, about those who have excessive and prolonged addiction to lust. It says, the nutritious ambil (a slightly fermented porridge made from either rice or nachani) and pej (a rice porridge) also become bitter and start stinking once they are kept for too long. Similarly, the healthful aloe vera turns bitter when overripe.

Chapter 5, verse 8 describes the manner in which animals were slaughtered and the mantras recited at that time. It also talks about opportunistic and half-witted Brahmins and what they were doing for their livelihood. It says that such Brahmins don't understand the rituals and never bother to ask the experts. Such cunning and hypocritical Brahmins try to kill animals with the desire to eat their meat. They lure common people into doing so by narrating false benefits of the yajna. Then they eat this meat declaring it as holy and proclaim that by eating this they have also become holy and free of all sins. They kill animals only with a greed to feed themselves. Only the petty desire of livelihood makes them kill animals.

From this it can be inferred that animal sacrifice was an acceptable practice in society.

The following proverb or saying is found in the literature of many saints: All hell breaks loose when a monkey gets hold of a potful of alcohol.

Chapter 5, verse 11 states: Every man in this world has easy access to women, meat and alcohol. They don't have to be told to procure these things. These are regularized by weddings, yajnas and ceremonies, but it is advisable and beneficial to stay away from them.

Chapter 5, verse 13 states what is to be done to practise religion in its purest form. It says that people interpret the word 'alambhan' as 'killing' while the real meaning of this word is touching or catching. The word has been used in the Vedas, stating that those who desire salvation must do '*pashu alambhan*'. As a result, people go on killing animals. But this is wrong. They should touch the animals and leave them. Only then will they become pure and pious. It debates and re-interprets alcohol consumption and animal sacrifice in various ways. All this goes to prove that both these things were commonly practised. Why would someone spend so much time and energy to oppose something that never existed?

Chapter 5, verse 14 describes the karmic cycle of the killer and the killed. According to it, in one birth humans slaughter animals, and in the next birth the same animals become butchers and kill animals (who were the humans who killed them in the previous birth) and eat their flesh. And so the cycle goes on.

Chapter 8, verse 8 describes the ill effects of lust and alcohol consumption. The festival of Shimga (Holi) is also mentioned. Of course, all these references appear as metaphors.

Chapter 9, verse 6 contains a poetic description of grinding grain:

> After being momentarily lost in thought, she was ready to grind the grains. When she raised her hands to lift the heavy pestle, the bangles in her hand would make a 'kinn–kinn' sound. Hearing this sound, she would blush and get engrossed in her thoughts …

Chapter 11, verse 18 talks about foolish scholars who trade jewels for bran and nectar for rice porridge and waste their knowledge in such unfair exchange.

Chapter 11, verse 30 describes the attributes of a sadhu (monk), his self-control, lustful feelings and diet habits.

In chapter 11, verse 33, the importance of ghee is used symbolically. It says:

> A meal is meaningless if there is no ghee, a sexual act is meaningless if there is no conception and a religious song is meaningless if there are no feelings of devotion. This is the truth.

Chapter 11, verse 43 says:

> Brahmins love to eat. Feeding them is the greatest donation. But it must be a whole-hearted treat of delicious sweets and an elaborate meal. Some people serve in a callous way, some feel disgusted and serve, some criticize the eaters while serving and some just serve in a crude way without attention to proportions and aesthetics. One should not behave thus. Brahmins should be given respect and served appropriately as per one's capacity.

Chapter 13, verse 4 contains an analysis of sattvic, rajasic and tamasic virtues. It describes how tamasic people love to consume alcohol made from mahua and sweet substances.

Eknathi Bhagavat, volume 2

Sri Bhagavata is originally narrated by Sri Narayana. Explaining what the Bhagavat is, it is said in Chapter 16:

> Sugarcane is squeezed to get the juice, but it doesn't last long. Jaggery is made by boiling it. It lasts longer but not long enough. Then sugar is made, which has a very long life.

It is implied that Bhagavat is like this sugar, which is everlasting.

Chapter 18, verse 2 says that in the Hindu way, life is divided into four stages: brahmachari (student), gruhastha (householder, working life), vanaprastha (retired) and sanyasi (renunciation). This verse talks about vanaprasthi people. They should eat seasonal fruits and roots as these are sacred and pure.

Verse 5 adds:

> Vanaprasthi people should eat chapati, rice, ripe seasonal fruits. They should eat all kinds of fruits if their teeth are strong. If the teeth have fallen, then fruits should be crushed on a stone along with their peels and seeds, and then eaten. They should not crave for taste.

Verse 6 decrees:

> It is forbidden to eat stale and rotten fruits. Eat the fruits of your own labour. Do not hoard fruits.

Verse 7 says:

Vanaprasthi people should perform yajna in the forests only. They should use forest fruits as a sacrifice in the fire of yajna. They should not sacrifice animals in their yajna while worshipping God.

Chapter 18, verse 18 in 'Sermon to Sanyasis' (those who live a life of renunciation) states:

> A sanyasi can accept alms from a Brahmin. If it is not available, then he can go to a Brahmin who is leading his life as a Kshatriya. If that is not available then to someone who is living like a Vaishya. And when all these three options are not available, accepting alms from even those living as Shudras is permissible.

Chapter 18, verse 25 ('Sermon to Sanyasis') says:

> If you eat sattvic food at a sattvic house, you will also get the sattvic benefit. You can immediately feel it with every morsel. Such is the virtue of sattvic food.

Chapter 21, verse 10 states:

> The purity or impurity of any object can be determined and achieved by using virtuous liquids like water; words of wisdom as given in the Vedas or words of one's own people, by processes, by time, as well as the intrinsic value of the object itself. (Purification of any material can be done by water or cow urine but it is rendered impure by human urine. Purification is done by words uttered by Brahmins. If the food is cooked in a large vessel, it is not considered impure if a part is touched by corrupt people or objects. But if it is a small quantity, then it is considered so.)

Chapter 21, verse 10 continues:

> Food prepared in ghee remains holy for many days. Food is contaminated with time; it becomes spoiled, smelly and infested with worms. Water stored in small vessels is rendered unclean if touched by a Chandal (Dalit). It is to be totally avoided. But if water is from a spring, it is flowing, or in a still pond, it is not unclean even if it is touched by a Chandal. Such water is always pure and holy. If a little food is cooked and if it is touched by a dog or a crow, it should be discarded. Such food is unclean. But if there is enough food to feed a thousand people, then only the part touched by the dogs or crows should be discarded. The rest of the food is considered clean and holy.

Chapter 21, verse 11 says:

> Grain taken from a Shudra becomes pure in one night. Cow's milk is sacred if it is kept in a clay pot or a bronze pot, and it is impure if kept in a copper pot. A copper vessel turns holy [by cleaning] with a sour substance. And sour foods are sanctified by salt. Heating makes ghee pure. Leather becomes pure with oil. And oil becomes pure when kept in a leather vessel.

Verse 14 talks about rituals to be performed in childhood which include garbhadhan (conception) and annaprashan (first food intake).

Verse 17 says that nomadic and tribal communities and sailors are allowed to eat non-vegetarian food and consume alcohol.

Verse 29 makes an analysis about why violence should be avoided:

> Yajna is the only exception where animal killing is allowed as part of the ritual. But people use it as an excuse to kill animals and eat their flesh. It is a sin to kill animals in order to eat their meat. That's why the Vedas have introduced restrictions to allow animal slaughter only for yajnas. If the animal cries for help while getting slaughtered, the person performing the yajna needs to atone for it.
>
> After an animal is killed, the host gets a share full of just one morsel. That, too, should be eaten without touching the teeth to each other. The host should not enjoy this process of eating meat. The host

has to atone for it if he eats this relishing its taste. This restriction is put down by the Vedas.

Chapter 23, verse 6 tells the story of a greedy and stingy Brahmin. It says such a Brahmin avoids the annual rituals to honour his dead parents and goes in search of petty jobs. He doesn't feel ashamed or scared. He is always greedy for money. He does not mind killing cows or other Brahmins.

Chapter 24, verses 12–13 say sugarcane is squeezed and its essence is extracted. This juice is boiled and turned into sugar. Experts make a lot of varieties of sweets from this sugar.

Chapter 25, verse 28 is an analysis of diet:

1. Sattvic: a pious, light, effortless diet. 'Holy food' obtained through religious and ethical practices.
2. Rajasic: sweet, well-roasted and charred, sour, fried in oil and ghee, mixed with sugar, spicy, chopped, rubbed with vegetables, astringent, rolled, simmered and reduced milk, etc. A mixture of one taste into another, raw mango juice, banana-and-milk mixture, fried papad, pungent pickles, chutneys. Rajoguni people consume a variety of foods which are prepared with great effort and diligence.
3. Tamasic: food having a strong odour. Eating these makes the mind insane. These are unholy and terribly painful like death.
4. Nirguna: prasad of the offering to the Lord, leftover food of the saints, which is pure.

Chapter 27, verse 34 describes naivedya (holy offering):

> Serve food to God only after incense sticks, dhoop [incense resins or sticks] and lamps are lighted. Meals should be cooked with a variety of delicious dishes, well-roasted and full of all tastes and juices. Sweet delicacies such as mande, sugar mande, jaggery purya, karanjya, fruits, kheer made in milk, kheer with reduced milk, sweet-pumpkin-and-wheat gharge, dry vade, sesame laddoo, mango vade, etc., should be prepared. There should be many leafy vegetables, soft rice, mung dal, freshly prepared cow's ghee. A delicious semolina pudding should be made by adding jaggery, cardamom, black pepper, ghee and nicely roasted semolina, and cooked well. It should be soft and smooth. Serve a delicious kadhi of buttermilk in a bowl. Serve a bowl full of mango juice and a bowl of shikran (mashed banana, sugar and milk) in the tray. Also add good curd, milk, cream, sugar in the tray. [However,] God does not see the rituals. He is satisfied with the devotee's faith and love.

Chapter 30, verse 21: Uses the metaphor of a kheer made with bitter pumpkin to give the message that the pumpkin may look all right but can taste bitter and if you make a kheer out of it without tasting it, that becomes a waste and sometimes poisonous too. It is a warning: don't go by external appearances, always see the inner truth.

Chapter 30, verses 11–12 describe liquor drunk by the Yadavs at a feast in the description of the destruction of the Yadav dynasty:

> The Yadavs performed all the rituals as guided by Sri Krishna. Everyone had a holy meal together. Then everyone brought a mix of various special alcoholic drinks and started consuming them. Whoever was addicted to this liquor became intoxicated. Yadavs glutted themselves on these special drinks. Their fragrance was enough to cause intoxication. There is one called 'maiyyerak'. It even makes an intelligent and smart man lose control and go berserk the moment it touches his tongue.

References in the literature of saints about the food that our Dalit castes ate during that era are limited to a single categorization of it being 'tamasic'. Non-vegetarian food is not mentioned but is specified as 'unholy food'. While researching food grains and diets, I came across numerous recipes and words. However, it was clear that our food culture was often ignored or, if mentioned, then it was certainly not in a pleasant or respectful manner. The purpose behind this research journey is to inform the present and future generations about our Dalit past and social position. The process of erasing social history, redefining it and writing a new one has already begun in India. Efforts are being made to flatten and crush the diversity in religion, sociology, caste, class, costume, dialect, language and food habits. In such a situation, at least this literature

of saints (if not distorted) will throw some light on our social condition of our past.

Although the economic condition of our castes has improved over the years, there is no significant change in our social status, social condition and people's mentality towards us. On the contrary, caste and religious identities have intensified over the years. Many Dalits assert today that they don't eat anything 'like that'. This is a clear indication of their deep-rooted shame and guilt for having committed the sin of eating that 'unholy' food. Backward communities have not been able to free themselves from the mental pressure imposed by society that their suffering is a result of sins committed in the past birth. Therefore, I felt it was important to study the literature of the saints and to cite a few selected references here.

Appended below is the list of fifty-one Vaishnav/Warkari saints whose literature I referred to for this chapter. The source is *Shri Sakalsantgaatha* vol. 1 and 2, edited by R.R. Gosavi.

1. Sarvadnya Shrichakradhar Swami
2. Nivruttinath
3. Dnyaneshvar
4. Sopandev
5. Muktabai
6. Changdev alias Chang Vateshwar
7. Namdev
8. Sant Janabai
9. Sant Nara
10. Sant Mahada
11. Sant Gonda
12. Sant Vitha
13. Sant Aaubai
14. Sant Limbai
15. Sant Ladai
16. Sant Parasa Bhagavt
17. Sant Vithoba Khechar
18. Sant Shekh Mahamad
19. Sant Kanhopatra
20. Sant Gora Kumbhar
21. Sant Jagamitra Naga
22. Sant Narahari Sonar
23. Sant Savala Mali
24. Sant Sena Nhavi
25. Sant Mankoji Bodhala (Jagatap)
26. Sant Chokhamela
27. Sant Soyarabai
28. Sant Banka Mahar
29. Sant Nirmala
30. Sant Karmamela
31. Sant Kanhopathak
32. Sant Sachchidanand baba
33. Sant Changa Keshavdas alias Changa Mudhesh
34. Sant Bahira Pisa
35. Bhagu Maharin
36. Sant Vatsara
37. Sant Dhongada
38. Sant Bhanudas Maharaj
39. Shrijanardan Swami

40. Sant Tukaram
41. Shrirameshvar Bhatt Vagholikar
42. Sant Bahinabai
43. Sant Niloba
44. Joga Paramanand
45. Bhagubai
46. Santoba Pawar
47. Raka Kumbhar
48. Kurmadas
49. Bhakt Damajan
50. Sant Sakhu
51. Santaji Teli Jagnade (Chaakankar)
52. Samarth Ramdas

12

The 1972 famine and its impact on the rural food culture of Marathwada

As the 1972 famine started receding, rural people began to move back to farming. Famine not only debilitated the rural social system completely, but also took away the so-called innocence of the rural population. People had become money-literate. Farmers and Dalit communities that had been dependent on farming migrated to Mumbai, Pune and other big cities due to the famine. Post-famine, even after learning about the possibility of getting wages in their own villages, the incidence of full families returning was low. Old people who were emotionally attached to village-life returned while their children stayed back in cities and visited the village on and off.

The young generation too felt a bond with their villages but the free atmosphere in the cities lured them more. No one in the city was inquisitive about their caste or other private matters. They were earning more with less drudgery compared to the villages. There were wider avenues beyond physical labour through which they were able to earn. There were jobs as well as small-time business prospects. They could also spend on trendy clothes, a wider variety of food and watching films. The generation which was now accustomed to city life would pine for city food such as vada-pao, misal-pao, shampal (spicy curry), khari, and butter-and-pao during their village trips.

This generation and the next slowly settled in the cities. Their relationship with the villages was confined only to weddings, fairs and rituals. The village name was their identity in cities. But in their own villages, they had no identity.

The people who returned to their villages or who never left, had become more business-like now. Farming wages were now almost entirely paid in cash. Earlier, people would get grains as wages and they would trade that with shopkeepers to buy things like tea, sugar, cooking oil and coconut oil. Shopkeepers were in control of determining the fair quantity of things that corresponded to the quantity of grains offered. Children would steal some grain from home when home alone and secretly purchased toffees and biscuits from shops. Daughters-in-law who suffered because of overbearing in-laws also adopted the same trick for saving some money of their own as a contingency. Salt, chillies, spices, oil, locally unavailable vegetables, dried prawns, dried Bombay duck, meat, sweets for children, or other things were bought from the weekly market. This transaction was facilitated by the aadatya, the middleman, who would give money for the grains and that money was used for other purchases. The sale of jowar, wheat, chillies, flax seeds, chana, toor, mung, urad, various pulses, daalga, peanuts, kardi, eggs, chickens or a goat would fetch money to be used for buying other things. Farmers would sell extra produce. There would be heaps of grain in the market before festival time.

After harvesting the main crops, the fields were open for others to visit and take away whatever remained. Children would collect these leftover cobs, fruits and so on from the farms and sell them in the shops. Money received from such a sale was called khulvar.

After the famine, the traditional methods of farming changed drastically. Crops which required less water and grew faster started getting chosen by farmers. Cultivation of hybrid varieties started growing. Sunflower, soya bean and hybrid jowar grown in the kharif season are products of the famine. Manual water-fetching devices were already becoming obsolete at the time of famine. Engines and pumps that ran on diesel had

entered the market, so manual equipment was becoming outdated. As a result, farmers' dependence on carpenters, cobblers and Mang workers reduced to a great extent. A new vocabulary that included words like engine, pulley, patta (belt), oil, delivery, pipe and 'football' (foot valve) made its way into the lives of rural people.

Instead of the manual 'moat' system (where water drawn up by pulley from a well was manually poured into an irrigation channel), now there was an engine attached to a well for watering crops. Manual moats would take a full day to water the crops; now it took just a few hours. Drawing more water in less time resulted in digging the wells deeper in the quest for more water. As watering the crops was made easier, farmers were inclined to take up cash crops.

After a few years almost all the villages got an electricity connection and with it came powerful electrical pumps which could extract water even from deep underground. With the advent of these electric pumps, engines became redundant. Water that had stayed stored over thousands and lakhs of years underground started rapidly depleting. The groundwater table kept dropping. With the innovation of borewells, what followed is before us to experience and examine. However, famine did reduce the stigma attached to untouchability which was earlier suffered at public places of water supply.

The invention of the motor facilitated the advent of grinding machines. Women were the happiest when these machines reached villages. They had had to wait years and years after the invention of the jaate stone grinder in Takshashila, for this innovation that reduced their toil considerably. Earlier women from every household (barring a handful of exceptions) had to get up early in the morning to grind grains for making bhakris. They would sing while grinding, probably to get over the toil, pain and discomfort. These songs had a particular rhythm and flow and they covered a wide range of topics related to women's lives. These songs came to be known as 'jatyavarchya ovya'. They are not merely a cultural heritage but also a history and documentation of the toil of common women. They did not emerge as an expression of joy, but in fact as an expression of an effort to forget distress. In that sense, they are real 'viranis' (songs of melancholy).

In this region, most farmers were dependent on rains for agriculture. As a result, there were very few rich farmers. People (of all castes) had very little diversity in their diet as all-season farming was not possible. All of them would get the same vegetables in the rainy season. A few farmers whose land was under irrigation, could grow all-season crops. That was the reason they could cook different food items than others.

So long as the 'moats' existed, many edible vegetables would grow wild near water channels. Landlords never objected to anyone collecting them. Incidentally, the popular Marathi film song that goes '*Malyachya malyamandi patacha pani jata, gulaab jaai jui mogra fulavita*' (The roses, jasmine and mogra blossom in the water that flows through the channels) is merely poetic imagery. The song suggests a very impractical aesthetic impulse to grow flowers by the water that flows through irrigation channels. But then, how can we expect urban poets to have this basic knowledge?

Moats used earthen channels and ditches, which disappeared and were replaced with clay channels for engines. Water from moats would flow slowly as if dancing in a joyous mood; it never used to destroy the farmland with its force. Electrical motors that came next pushed the water with tremendous force that resulted in the breaking of clay channels. To overcome this, the channels were built with stones and bricks. Then the pipeline system came into existence. As the availability of water started to wane, methods of regulating and channelizing the water were developed.

With this altered system, vegetables like tandulja, which poor people used to get freely in all seasons, started declining, and people had to buy vegetables that even goats didn't eat. With the entry of weed killers, the naturally occurring vegetables that grew at the weir started disappearing too. Nowadays even vegetables like pathri are seen in the market for sale. People never had to purchase vegetables like pumpkins, ridge gourds, smooth gourds and drumsticks even after the famine. Quacks took an opportunity to propagate the so-called medicinal value of these vegetables and the middle class quickly came forward to purchase these for the sake of their health at any price. As a result, even the villagers had to buy them in their own village.

The same story was repeated in the case of kardi (safflower) oil as well. Farmers used to cultivate the needed quantity of this crop and got oil by crushing it at local oil mills. The media pushed the propaganda

that kardi oil is good for the heart and it became a rare commodity overnight even for the villagers. The same thing happened with jowar, nachani (ragi) and some other crops.

Till the time of the famine, these castes used very little oil in their diet because of its scarcity and high price. Ample use of peanut crush was the alternative to oil. Apart from peanut crush, sesame powder and niger seeds powder were also used in vegetables. Peanut crush was not used in non-vegetarian food except for in the curry of intestines. Some good cooks used to make this curry using red chilli powder and peanut crush.

Along with other food, grains, palm oil and, subsequently, soyabean as well as sunflower oil were distributed to the famine sufferers. The common man never knew what these were made of. Even today, people are unaware about the source of palm oil. People of these castes never had a sufficient quantity of peanuts or safflower to extract oil from them. Even if they had enough, there was no guarantee that the teli (the person who owns the machinery and makes oil) would oblige.

As palm oil became an alternative to peanut or safflower oil, even the poor people's kitchens had trickles of it. Soyabean and sunflower oil followed afterwards. The use of oil in curries rose to a great extent. The floating layer of oil on the curry acquired more weightage than its taste and a woman cooking this kind of curry started getting recognition as a good cook. Curries that would be prepared only with peanut crush were now prepared with a tempering of oil and peanut crush both. Sometimes only oil tempering was used.

Previously, when preparing meat, a tempering of onion wasn't necessary. If one wanted it, pieces of animal fat were first fried and onion was added to it and used as a tempering. The original recipe called for washed meat pieces to be added to the earthen pot and then cooked, adding salt, turmeric powder, onion and coriander. After the meat was cooked, a thin paste was made using yesur and lightly roasted jowar or bajra flour and added to the curry, and then it would be cooked further. Ginger-and-garlic paste was introduced to this recipe much later.

During the 1972 famine the scarcity of food grains was much more than that of water. Hence wheat, saatu (buckwheat), maize, milo hybrid jowar and rice were imported. Along with this came gaajar gavat (congress grass), yedi babhal (a variant of acacia), besharam (*Ipomoea carnea*), jalaparni (water hyacinth) and also wildflower seeds from other countries. Even today, on grasslands, yellow and multicoloured Mexican flowers are seen, which have adapted to Indian conditions.

Along with cheap edible oil, milk powder was also imported. Post famine, corn, saatu and milo disappeared from the diet. Hybrid jowar, called 'hybret' colloquially, remained in the diet. It survived because firstly, the crop matured very quickly in the kharif season; secondly, it was not a bad alternative to the local jowar when fresh; and lastly, because it was easy to adulterate the 'real local jowar' with it while selling in the city or to the middlemen.

The diet of the Mang and Mahar castes in this region contained a negligible quantity of wheat. It was used mainly for making puran poli during festivals, chapatis when travelling and for making kurvadya, shevaya, botave, gara and kheer. As jowar became scarce in famine time, wheat was preferred over other grains, and a new item named 'dushkali roti' (famine roti) emerged! Dushkali roti is a dry chapati made without using oil.

But after the famine, since cheap edible oil was available, the trend of oily chapatis caught on. Such oily chapatis were seen everywhere such as school children's lunchboxes or as tiffin for anyone travelling. There was a time when only Brahmins would eat chapatis. The changed dynamics made it possible for other people to follow suit. Jowar took a back seat and eating wheat chapatis became a status symbol.

Similarly, there was no prominent place for rice except during festivals. Such occasions arrived hardly twelve or fourteen times in a year. There was a misconception about rice that it would build flatulence and pus in wounds. Although chapatis have developed a stronghold now, despite giving rise to complaints of stomach pain and bloating, eating rice has not become a trend here even today.

Some of the grains, pulses, oil and other things, which were eaten out of compulsion during the famine, later became part of the diet. Things that were liked, affordable or were consumed by the upper castes were accepted. Jowar bhakris needed more gravy and eating them with dry curries created discomfort in the throat. Now with the option of chapatis, even dry curries could be consumed. Chapatis would not get dry and rough in the tiffin like the bhakris would.

Along with chapatis, it became commonplace to purchase the previously scarcely seen vegetables like potato, tomato, cabbage, cauliflower and capsicum. Curry leaves also acquired a place in the kitchens of the Mangs and Mahars. The preparation of these vegetables was a mix of convention and modernity.

Tomatoes, which actually had arrived in India 150 years ago, became part of the diet only after the famine. Nowadays vegetarian and non-vegetarian food is considered incomplete without tomatoes. In earlier times, if there was nothing else in the house, kandavani (onion chutney) would be prepared. The same recipe is followed now to prepare chutney with raw or ripe tomatoes. Gravies are prepared now using cooked potatoes and peanut crush. In wedding food preparations, the potato was upgraded to the level of brinjal. The recipe for stuffed brinjal was followed to prepare stuffed capsicum.

Households which had looked down upon even tea, considering it a foreign habit, now started waiting for the bread-seller's cycle to stop by every morning. The milk of animals owned by them, which used to be consumed by children in the house, was now sold to the dairies. Before, the buying and selling of eggs would take place in the village itself. Now the production and scale increased and egg-collection vehicles started coming from outside the village. Non-vegetarian food was typically prepared once a week before the famine; now the frequency increased due to availability of cheap and infertile chickens from the poultries.

With the advancement of transportation systems and advertising media, one could see other fruits like grapes, apples, sweet limes, oranges, chikoo, pineapple and pomegranate, along with the usual local ones in the diet. Licensed liquor shops and bars started operating. Eating in a restaurant was not considered prestigious earlier but now it earned social status. The use of jowar lost its dignity, oil-slapped chapatis took over and their name also was upgraded to polya, which was common only amongst Brahmin families.

The changing times saw the progression from earthen fire chools (stoves) to kerosene stoves to gas burners in the kitchen. These kerosene stoves killed many newly married girls and provided a way to cover up the murders of many other women. A bhakri prepared on the traditional earthen chool in a dhaba or a restaurant was now costlier than the chapati. People were bored of yesur and started going to restaurants to eat oily, garam-masala-influenced meat curries. They didn't mind waiting there for these trendy curries but they couldn't stop feeling nostalgic for chanya (dried meat preparations) and lakuti (animal blood preparation).

The dowry system had already established itself in the Mang and Mahar castes, now the amount and the pomp increased. The conventional food items prepared for the weddings disappeared. Most Mahars adopted Buddhism and most Mangs chose to keep following Hinduism. Neo-Buddhists stopped praying to Hindu deities openly but the Mangs, whose entry in those temples is prohibited even today, started worshipping the gods of the upper caste people.

The aroma of fennel seeds, carom seeds and warm fomentation for the newborn baby went away. The convention of burial after death was replaced by cremation which in fact was a luxury. Instead of mati (soil), now asthi (ashes) became a part of the last rites. People started visiting pilgrimage places for 'asthi visarjan' (immersion of ashes). On the third day after the death of a person, the Mangs' mourning would be over. Now they started performing all the rites like the tenth day, thirteenth day, monthly prayers, etc. Brahmins who never catered to these castes, now started accepting their bestowals for giving salvation to their dead after conveniently tweaking the norms.

Neo-Buddhists and Mangs thus parted ways and chose different paths. Actually, both the castes should have adopted the same ideological path that was set forth by Phule, Shahu Maharaj and Ambedkar; but …

Epilogue

While comprehending the literature of saints, it struck me very strongly that there are no question marks. Also, there is no critique of this literature—neither criticism nor reviews. Saintly literature, or for that matter, any religious literature, is considered to be holy and thus reviewing it or challenging it is branded as a 'sin'. That may also be the reason for the absence of question marks. Humans were categorized or divided amongst themselves into religions, classes, castes and sects. It could have been a revolution in those times. It could have been the need of that hour. Prominent people from society would have found this necessary for the ease of human habitation and development in those times. A defined framework may have been imperative.

But everything has an end, should have an end. Why did the subsequent generations not have the awareness of what should have been discarded and discontinued over time? On the contrary, the phrase 'old is gold' is used rampantly to preserve social wrongs that violate basic human rights. Because of this, the majority of the population is being increasingly harassed day by day. Those who had control over the religious hierarchy still continue to have it, even though times have changed. One may not see this on paper. But in practice, their superlative existence hurts all the time.

Praising democracy on the one hand and dictating how people should behave on the other—this dichotomy is on the rise. This behaviour does not facilitate the healthy growth of a society. The increase in the self-proclaimed cultural police is a warning alarm for the future functioning of a healthy democracy. A hundred or more years ago, the social scenario was quite different. Indian society was tightly divided amongst classes, castes and sects. This can't be justified in today's times. That system prevailed for centuries together without any dissent, because of socio-religious needs. There was a system which sustained the tradition of verbal cognizance of the Vedas. Similarly, there was a system which believed in the hierarchy of classes and castes. There still is. There have been transfers of power but the fact remains that no ruler could ever change this system.

The invention of the steam engine gave a push to the stagnated thought process of countries all over the world. That inevitably reflected in India as well. The dimensions of social systems were recomposed. But what is today's picture of this country?

'Self-respect' of each caste is more and more intense and awakened.

Religious extremism is much more than what it was earlier.

Religion and caste-based insensitivity and intolerance is on the rise.

Science has brought the world very close. But the irony is that using the same science and technology, various groups based on religion, caste and class are formed on social media who are busy 'exchanging valuable thoughts' with each other.

Around a century ago, society was formed on the strong hierarchical ladder based on class and caste because religion had imposed it. Today there is no compulsion, yet we are engulfing ourselves in class, caste and sects. This picture of today's framework is not healthy for the unity and integrity of the society.

The intention behind writing this is not to criticize this just for the sake of criticism. I have always heard that our religious texts and saints have done an important thing by keeping 'society united' and have saved 'our religion from the aggression of foreign religions' in those times. In that case, where exactly did the caste, class and religion that I was born in, stand? I went backwards in search of the answer. I realized that my forefathers also have made an important contribution towards keeping 'society united.' They did not drift away from the ladder's step that was assigned to them. They played their role, which the system had chosen for them, in a flawless manner for years together, without any dissent. I feel I am also doing the same thing

from a different level and perspective. Because of my ‘sin’ of writing this book I don’t know in which form I will be born in the next birth. However, may such ‘literary sins’ continue to be committed relentlessly.

GLOSSARY

abhanga	A form of devotional song composed in a particular meter. The word literally means a wholesome, continuous thing. (A = non, Bhang = ending, disruption or interruption)
ahar	Diet.
alu/chimkura	Colocasia or taro.
alutedar	Hereditary service providers in the villages of Maharashtra, not directly essential to farming, including artisans and entertainers.
ambadi	*Hibiscus sabdariffa* or roselle grown as a crop to produce rope; its tender, sour leaves are used as a vegetable.
ambalgath	Colon, end of intestine.
ambil	A slightly fermented porridge made from either rice or nachani (finger millet).
ambura	Fermented (*literal*); a mixture of all kinds of extra food items that were mixed in a large pot and left to keep hot on a slow fire, and eaten over several days.
amti	Spicy dal or curry.
bajra	Pearl millet.
bal	Fat within the meat.
balutedar	Hereditary service providers in the villages of Maharashtra, directly essential to farming, including village administrators, priests and astrologers.
barbat	The sacred meat curry eaten during festivals, celebrations and navas.
barka ghol	Wild purslane or *Portulaca quadrifida*, a variant of hagarya ghol.
besan	Chickpea flour or Bengal gram.
bhaat	Usually cooked rice. However, in villages any porridge-like or boiled preparations made using any grains or pasta is also called bhaat.
bhagar	Samo rice or barnyard millet.
bhakri/bhakar	Flatbread made of bajra or jowar flour.
bharit	A dish made with roasted and mashed brinjals.
bheja	Brain.
bhendra	Okra.
bhopla	Pumpkin.
bhopli	Pumpkin vines.
boka	Kidneys.
bhokar	The fruits and flowers of the Indian cherry or glue berry (lasoda or Cordia indica).
botave/botve	A kind of wheat pasta, thick, the length of one-third of a finger.
botya/botkya	Small pieces of mutton (sheep, goat, beef and buff) about the size of one-third of a finger.
chaani/chaanya	Dried meat chunks.

chakala/chakal	A large/long chunk of meat.
chakvat	A leafy vegetable.
chalbat/chilbat	Inferior-quality meat.
chana	Chickpeas/gram.
chana dal	Split and hulled Bengal gram.
chapati	A wheat roti (unleavened flatbread).
charbat	The undigested herbaceous mixture in the digestive tract of animals.
chati-boti	Little scraps of membrane and tendons adhering to meat.
Chaturmas	Four months in the Hindu calendar of abstinence and fasting, Shravan, Bhadrapad, Ashwin and Kartik (approximately early July to early November).
chavli	Black-eyed peas.
chavlichi sheng	Chavli beans.
chigal	Wild purslane or *Portulaca quadrifida*, a variant of hagarya ghol.
chigur	Flowers of tamarind.
chimkura/alu	Colocasia or taro.
chinch	Tamarind.
chinglya	Small fish.
chool	Wood-burning cookstove, usually made of mud or stones.
chuka	Green sorrel.
chunchune	Crispy pieces of fried fat of beef and buff.
daalga	Broken dal produced when grinding whole dal in a hand mill to clean the husk.
dal	Dal refers to dried, split pulses.
dalli/dallya	Small pieces of meat (goat, sheep, beef and buff).
dhawara	Sacred meal to celebrate a harvest.
dhirdi	Pancakes commonly made using rice, nachani, besan, moong, jowar.
dhoti	A form of measurement in agriculture in Marathwada: the space between the two arms stretched straight out in front of the body, both arms and palms parallel to each other at a shoulder distance.
dil	Heart.
Diwali faral	The sweet and savoury feast prepared during the festival of Diwali.
dodke	Ridge gourd.
dodya	Unripe figs of the audumbar tree (fig or *Ficus glomerata*).
dudhi	Bottle gourd. Also called shingadi bhopla because it is long and curved like cattle horns. It has smooth, pale-green skin and is milk-white inside.
fanulya	Similar to nakulya, but instead of nail imprints these are pressed and made flatter.
faral	Snacks.
fardul	Gristle.
fashi	Epiglottis.
fofis	Lungs.

gabhulaleli chinch	Ripened tamarind fruit; pregnant tamarind (*literal*).
gana	Windpipe.
gara	Semolina/rava.
gavari	Guar or cluster beans.
gavlani	Symbolic statues of milkmaids made from cow dung.
gharge	Sweet flattened fried puris made out of red pumpkin, jaggery and wheat flour.
ghevda	Common beans (usavarli sheng).
gole/ladu	Sweet balls made of various flours with sugar/jaggery and flavoured with cardamom, etc.
ghugarya	Mixed grains boiled with salt.
gulavani	A thin savoury-sweet gravy/sauce of water, salt, jaggery and ginger made as an accompaniment to puran poli.
gondhal	Religious songs and dances performed by traditional folk artists.
gudada/gurda	Kidneys.
gunya/gunna/gunnya	Pigs or desi pigs.
haade/hadka	Bones.
hadga	*Sesbania grandiflora* or hummingbird tree; the flowers are cooked as a vegetable.
hagarya ghol	Purslane or *Portulaca oleracea*, grows near water, the whole plant is eaten; studies have found it very nutritious.
halal	Way of killing animal, where its throat is slit and it is allowed to bleed to death.
harbharyachi bhaji	The vegetable culled from the chickpea plant, comprising the young shoots and leaves.
helya	Male buffalo.
hurda	Fresh, tender kernels of jowar.
irwad	Diverse (*literal*); term for coprophagy by ruminants.
jaate	A stone hand mill to grind grain into flour.
jagran	Religious songs and dances performed by traditional folk artists.
javas	Flax seeds.
javasachi bonde	Flax fruits.
jeebh	Tongue.
jhingya	Shrimp
jowar	Sorghum.
kaaran/kaayra	Ceremonial sacrifice of a male buffalo and ensuing feast; reason (*literal*).
kaas/khiri	Udder.
kadi	Tempered buttermilk.
kalij/kalaji	Liver.
kalana	Smaller powdery pieces of dal. Produced when grinding whole dal in a hand mill to clean the husk
kalvan	Curry with gravy.
kanda	Onion.

kanduri	Thanksgiving feast for close family on fulfilment of a prayer.
kanya	Grains; porridge made of grains.
karale	Niger seeds.
karanjya/kanavale	Fried sweet dumplings.
kardi	Safflower.
karli	Bitter gourd.
kasab	Butcher of large ruminants.
katmat	Spiny amaranth or *Amaranthus spinosus*, a wild plant whose young flower combs are eaten.
khand	Chunk; medium-sized piece of mutton/meat.
kharda	Dry chutney made by roughly pounding (kharadne) together fried chillies with garlic, salt, coriander and often peanuts, eaten as an accompaniment to bhakri.
khatik	Butcher of goats and sheep.
kheema/khima/kima	Minced meat.
khichda	Porridge, usually made of jowar.
khale	A threshing floor made by wetting, ramming and smoothing the ground in a wide, round space.
khar	Pickle.
kharif	Crops typically sown at the beginning of the first monsoon rains and harvested in late September to October.
kheer	A sweet pudding made using milk and sugar or jaggery and water along with rice or wheat.
khur	Hooves/trotters.
khur-mundi	Trotters and head.
kohala	Ash gourd.
kopis	Lungs.
kordyas	A dry curry.
kotmir	Coriander.
koyri	Velvet bean (*Mucuna pruriens*).
kunku	Kumkum or vermilion powder used in rituals.
kurdu	*Celosia argentea* or silver cock's comb, a weed used as a leafy vegetable, grows in fields and on the riverside.
kurvadya	Sun-dried snacks made of soaked and dried wheat, fried and used as a side dish.
lakuti	A dish made from blood.
lekuravali paat	Tender spring onions.
limbu	Lemon.
lombya	The fresh ears of wheat.
Mahar	A Dalit subcaste in Maharashtra, now converted to Buddhism.
mand	The deposit of pure fat found in various parts of the body.
mande	Large-sized puran poli roasted on a large pan turned upside down.
Mang	A Dalit subcaste in Maharashtra.

mansahari	Non-vegetarian.
manskand/maskhand	Large pieces/chunks of meat.
masur	Red lentil.
mendu/mindu	Brain.
methi	fenugreek.
mirchichya ropanchya pananchi bhaji	Curry of the leaves of chilli seedlings.
misal-pao	Spicy gravy of moth beans eaten with pao—Indian bread, raw onions, lime and crunchy farsan.
mishrahari	Eater of a mixed diet; flexitarian.
moat	Marathi word for a system of irrigation where water was drawn up by pulley from a well and was manually poured into an irrigation channel.
morva	A medium-sized earthen pot.
mugi/mungi	A variant of dudhi (bottle gourd); its skin has dark green stripes.
mula	Radish.
Mulani	Muslim butcher of smaller animals, included as a subcaste in the list of balutedars.
mung	Green gram.
mutke	Dough balls shaped with the fist.
musal	A mortar; term also for a small pestle and mortar used for pounding chillies, etc.
mulyachya pananchi bhaji	Radish leaves.
mulyachya shenga	Beans of radish.
nagdive	Lamps made from dough.
naivedya	Food offering to God.
nakulya	Tiny chunks of wheat pasta pressed with the thumbnails, having nail imprints.
navas	Seeking fulfilment of wishes from deities and offering animal sacrifices in return once fulfilled.
paat	Any long leaves, e.g., garlic leaves, spring onion leaves.
paata-warwanta	A flat grinding stone (paata) and a smaller hand-held grinding stone (warwanta).
paathari	Country dandelion or *Launaea procumbens*, a common weed that grows near dams, fields and elsewhere, eaten when tender.
paay/paaya	Hooves/trotters.
pachunda	A bundle of five sheaves of a harvested crop.
pad	Dead animal—literally ‘fallen’.
padval	Snake gourd.
palak	Spinach.
pangat	Row of seating on the ground for ceremonial meals.
pao	Bread bun.
papadya	Papad/poppadum, a thin crisp wafer-like flatbread.
paradi	A basket for carrying small idols of gods/goddesses.
parkand	Stomach of a ruminant.

par/jigari/sundari/vaijayanta	Different names for the same body part.
parushi dodke	Silk squash.
patadi	Sword beans.
pej	A rice porridge.
pekat	The meat of the animal's lower back or the hind legs.
pofis	Lungs.
pol-pat	Board for rolling out chapatis and other flatbreads.
puran	The filling for puran poli: a finely ground mixture of dal, jaggery, fennel and ginger.
puran poli/poli/polya	A sweet delicacy made of a wheat chapati stuffed with puran (see above) and roasted. Those made using plenty of oil are superior and called telchya; those with less oil are polya.
purya	(plural of puri) Small round wheat breads that are deep fried until they puff up and turn brown
raala	Foxtail millet.
rabi	Winter crops, grown in October or November and harvested in spring.
ragati/rakti	Blood.
rajasic	One of the three gunas or qualities in Hindu philosophy.
rajgira	Amaranth or *Amaranthus*, same family (Amaranthaceae) as tandulja.
ras	Juice.
ratali	Sweet potato.
rava	Superior quality meat; semolina (*literal*).
ravi	Buttermilk churner made of wood.
rodge	Thick bhakris.
saguti	Beef or buffalo meat (buff); curry made from beef or buff. Most Marathi-speaking people are familiar with the word saguti, commonly used for mutton or chicken curry. But among the Mang and Mahar communities, this word is mainly used for beef or buff.
sajgurya	Lamps made from bajra flour.
sandage	Sun-dried chunks of vegetables mixed with pulses and spices.
sanja	Porridge made from jowar or wheat.
sanskruti-palak mansahari	Culture-compliant non-vegetarian.
shakahari	Vegetarian.
sattvic	One of the three gunas or qualities in Hindu philosophy.
shengolya	The common name in villages for nugget-like chunks. Also called vadya.
shendur	An orange-coloured substance used in puja and for painting stone idols.
shepu	Dill.
shevaga	Drumstick or moringa.
shevaya	Long, thin noodles.
shevgyacha pala	Moringa (drumstick tree) leaves, used as a vegetable; considered highly nutritious.
Shelvaticha taur	The fruits and flowers of the Indian cherry or glue berry (lasoda or *Cordia indica*).
shidori	Chapatis stuffed with a sweet filling of semolina and jaggery.

shingadi bhopla	Bottle gourd (dudhi). It is called shingadi bhopla because it is long and curved, like cattle's horns. It has smooth, pale-green skin and is milk-white inside.
shikaran	A sweet dish made of bananas mashed with milk and jaggery.
shingat	Horn of a dead animal.
shira	A sweet dish made of semolina and jaggery.
sukhe khand	Dried meat chunks.
tamasic	One of the three gunas or qualities in Hindu philosophy.
tandulja	Spiny amaranth or *Amaranthus spinosus.*
tandya	Pigs or desi pigs.
tarvat	Avaram senna or *Senna auriculata*, a wild plant valued for its leaves for food.
tava	Round shallow griddle for roasting flatbreads.
tekale	Mushrooms.
telchya	See puran poli above.
til	Sesame.
thecha	Dry chutney made by grinding together roasted peanuts with garlic, salt, coriander, green chillies or red chillies, eaten as an accompaniment to bhakri. (Stone grinding is called thechane in Marathi.)
tona	Long bones.
toor dal	Pigeon pea.
ukhal	A large and heavy mortar carved out of a monolithic stone.
undwar	The peritoneum holding the abdominal viscera.
udid	Black gram dal or black lentils.
uradi	Chest/breast meat; chops.
usavarli sheng	Common beans (ghevda).
vada-pao	Potato balls dipped in wet gram flour and deep fried, placed inside a bread bun, generally accompanied with one or more chutneys.
vade	Sun-dried chunks of vegetables mixed with pulses and spices.
vadya	The common name in villages for nugget-like chunks. Also called shengolya.
vangi	Brinjal/eggplant.
vashat	*adj*. Fatty, greasy. *noun*. Raw meat.
vasu	Fat.
vishesh shuddha shakahari	Special pure vegetarian.
vili	A large, heavy iron knife hinged to a long wooden slab, used in traditional Maharashtrian kitchens.
waagava	Refraining from many religious practices, including giving food or alms, is observed on certain days like twelve days following a death, or a birth in a household. If someone knocks on the door for food or alms during such a period, the word waagava is uttered as an indication of apology and a request to leave and go to the next household.
waghate	The fruits of a thorny vine (Ceylon caper or *Capparis zeylanica*).

wajadi	Intestines.
walvana	Dried and fried items.
washat	Any meat.
watandar	Another term for balutedar.
wayalya/wayalatya	Meat in the code language of Mangs.
yajna	Hindu rituals centred on a sacred fire.
yelvanachi	Dal water.
yesur	Powdered spice mixture made of red chillies, coconut, salt and spices, used in cooking in many dishes.

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About the Book

'This is the food my parents ate and their parents ate ... It is an acquired taste, especially one acquired through centuries of discrimination.'

A landmark publication in Marathi, Shahu Patole's book *Anna He Apoorna Brahma* was the first to document Dalit food history through the culinary practices of two Maharashtrian communities— Mahar and Mang. Fashioned as a memoir with recipes, it explores the politics of maintaining social divisions through foods, along with a commentary on caste-based discrimination—what food is sattvic (pure) or rajasic (fit for a king), what is tamasic (sinful) and why.

Now translated as *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada*, this book presents the poor man's patchwork plate, one devoid of oil, ghee and milk, and comprising foods not known to Savarna dictionaries. It also examines Hindu scriptures that prescribed what each varna should eat—and questions the idea that one becomes what one eats. From humble fare to festive feasts, the recipes carefully woven into the narrative show you the transformative power of food in connecting communities and preserving cultural identity.

About the Author

Shahu Patole, a distinguished Marathi-language writer and retired government officer, has a master's in economics and journalism. He was selected for the Indian Information Service by the UPSC in 1991 and has held positions in the Press Information Bureau, Defence PRO, Directorate of Field Publicity, All India Radio and Mumbai Doordarshan (news sections). Shahu passionately addresses caste, religion, food, politics, sex and social issues in his books, articles and on social media. He divides his time between Osmanabad and Aurangabad in Maharashtra.

About the Translator

Bhushan Korgaonkar is a multilingual writer, director, theatre producer and translator. Celebrated for his engaging stories on Storytel and popular songs on YouTube, Bhushan is also a featured contributor to *Loksatta* and *Mint Lounge*, sharing tales of his culinary adventures. He has engaged with traditional Lavani artistes and written the book *Sangeet Bari* on their lives. As the founder of B Spot Productions, Bhushan directs award-winning theatre productions and aims to foster community storytelling, sensory exploration and dialogue on taboo topics, while also offering dance and writing workshops, food trails and culture trails.

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